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**THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF
EXITING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

A THESIS

**Presented to the Department of Social Work
California State University, Long Beach**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work**

**By Robert T. Morano, Jr.
BA, 1998 Antioch University at Los Angeles
May 2001**

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ABSTRACT
THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF
EXITING JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

By Robert T. Morano, Jr.

May 2001

This is an exploratory study conducted with 16 former members of the religion known as Jehovah's Witnesses. Data gathering was implemented by the use of a question guide designed to solicit the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of the former members while they were members in good standing, as well as the psychological and social implications that may have affected them upon formally exiting.

The results indicate that membership in good standing in this religious organization is contingent upon compliance to the directives and the belief system of its Governing Body. Exiting members of this religious organization present common themes of feelings, thoughts, and beliefs that are contrary to those directives.

The researcher identifies a *continuum of exiting stages* that may plot the progress of former members, which includes a *matrix of membership* and the *existence of exit*. Implications for social work practice and research are discussed.

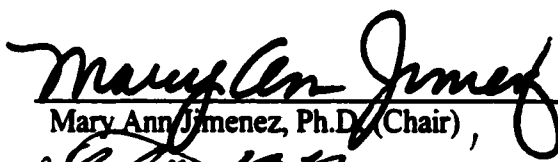


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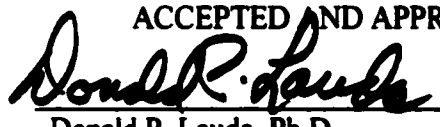
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DEFINITION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TERMS

active	A term applied by members of Jehovah's Witness to refer to members who participate in "all" the required activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, which includes attending meetings, preaching the doctrines, field service, and adherence to the social sanction of associating with only Jehovah's Witnesses.
apostate	One who at one time was a member in good standing with the Organization, who has been removed or voluntarily left to pursue or promote knowledge and information contrary to the teachings of the WTB&TS.
Armageddon	The final battle between good and evil, when God and his angels fight and destroy the Devil and his demons. Jehovah's Witnesses believe the battle of Armageddon will be fought on earth, and that they will survive because they have the one true religion. All other religions are false and originate from the Devil; those people who practice such religion, political leaders and the "wicked" will die at Armageddon.
assembly	A gathering of various local Congregations within a Circuit or a District.
back call	A return visit to a person who might have accepted a publication or a piece of literature published by the WTB&TS.
baptism	Total immersion in any convenient body of water. Designated as a symbol of dedication to Jehovah. Jehovah's Witnesses do not practice infant baptism
Bethel	The name given to the living quarters of those who work at the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York.
Bethel Service	Serving as an employee of the WTB&TS at the Brooklyn, New York headquarters. Duties may include menial labor, factory work in the printing plant, or skilled labor where needed.

Bethelite	One who is a resident of Bethel at the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York, and is engaged as an employee paid by stipend.
Bible Study	A study of a WTB&TS publication with an interested person.
Book Study	One of the five meetings held each week for an hour. This meeting is a small group (approximately 5 – 15 people) who meet in a private home and study a designated publication written and distributed by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Branch	A collective of Districts.
Circuit	A collective of local Congregations (number varies according to demographics).
Congregation	A local body of members consisting of approximately 100 – 125 Jehovah's Witnesses (total number varies by location or ethnicity and may be smaller for specific enclaves).
Convention	A gathering of Districts or Branches for the purposes of disseminating WTB&TS teachings.
Disassociate	"Disassociation is an action taken by an individual who has decided that he no longer desires to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses" (WTB&ST, 1991, p.101).
Disfellowship	To be removed from the record of member's in good standing with the Organization.
District	A collective of Circuits.
door-to-door	The activity of preaching by going from house-to-house.
Elder	An adult male member of Jehovah's Witnesses who volunteers his time as a group leader, teacher, public speaker, spiritual counselor and participates in official business for the Congregation such as a Judicial Committee. Almost all elders maintain fulltime jobs outside of the Organization to support themselves and their families, unless they are retired from secular work.
field service	The preaching work conducted in the community by going from door-to-door.

incidental witnessing Kingdom Hall	<p>Any conversation with a non-Jehovah Witness related to the message of the Organization.</p> <p>The name of the building in the community where Jehovah's Witnesses meet.</p>
Ministerial Servant	<p>An adult male member of Jehovah's Witnesses who volunteers his time as a group leader, teacher, public speaker, and assistant to the elders of the Congregation. Almost all ministerial servants maintain fulltime jobs outside of the Organization to support themselves and their families, unless they are retired from secular work. The only educational requirement is to be able to read and write the language of the Congregation within which they serve.</p>
missionary work	<p>A special field service assignment in a foreign land. Training is supplied by the WTB&TS to be able to carry out this task.</p>
Organization, The	<p>A term that applies to the overarching corporation which also carries the implication of "all" the entities, such as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania; International Bible Students Association, Brooklyn, New York; Branches, Districts, Circuits and Congregations to all of the above that Jehovah's Witnesses consider themselves to be members.</p>
pioneer	<p>A Jehovah's Witness that participates in preaching for a specific number of hours a month (from 50 – 100 or more). Also includes Vacation Pioneer or Auxiliary Pioneer.</p>
public reproof	<p>A disciplinary action taken upon one found, by a Judicial Committee, to be guilty of conduct unbecoming a Christian. This decision is announced to the Congregation publicly, and the act of doing so is considered reproofing publicly.</p>
public talk	<p>One of the five meetings held each week for an hour at the local Kingdom Hall. This meeting is an hour long discourse of a religious nature presented at the Kingdom Hall for the Congregation and the public.</p>
resurrection	<p>A Jehovah's Witness belief that all who have died will be raised to life on earth at some time in the future after Armageddon.</p>
servant	<p>A short form of ministerial servant.</p>

Service Meeting	One of the five meetings held each week for an hour at the local Kingdom Hall. This meeting teaches how to preach or “witness” to non-members.
shunning	The practice of turning away from another by cutting off all social engagement, support, or any interaction of an interpersonal nature. The Jehovah’s Witness practice towards members who are disfellowshipped or disassociated.
Society, The	A term applied by any of Jehovah’s Witness to refer to the collective members of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
spiritually ill (sick)	A member who is deficient in activity or inactive.
street witnessing	Visibly displaying the <i>Watchtower</i> and <i>Awake</i> magazines, or other WTB&TS literature, with the intent to distribute to the public, or the act of stopping people at random to engage them in conversation about the Organization’s message.
Theocratic Ministry School meeting	One of the five meetings held each week for an hour at the local Kingdom Hall. This meeting is designed to teach member’s how to speak in public.
Truth, The	A term applied by any of Jehovah’s Witness to refer to the collective of members of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Watchtower Study	One of the five meetings held each week for an hour at the local Kingdom Hall. This meeting is a Congregational audience participation study and reading of a specific article in the Watchtower magazine a bi-monthly journal published and distributed by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.
Witness	One of Jehovah’s Witnesses. It can also be said that to <i>witness</i> to someone meant to talk at length about the Organization’s message.
witnessing	Any contact with a non-Jehovah Witness that carries the intent of preaching.
world headquarters	Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Incorporated, located in Brooklyn, New York, which also operates as Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, and the International Bible Students Association, Brooklyn, New York.
worldly	Non-Jehovah’s Witnesses or persons who live a life of the <i>world</i> apart or without deference for WTB&TS doctrines, standards, or compliance to the directives of the Governing Body.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADL(s)	Activity(ies) of daily living
DTS	Danger to self
DTO	Danger to others
NRM(s)	New Religious Movement(s)
WTB&TS	Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The development of many modern day religions extracted their form and substance from what is known as the “New Religious Movement” (NRM) starting in the mid-twentieth century and continued on into the present (Billings & Scott, 1994; Fisher, 1999; Fix, 1989; Gallus, 1972; Gaustad, Miller & Stokes, 1979; La Barre, 1971; Langone, 1991; Robbins & Anthony, 1979). On the one hand sociologists raise the question if NRMs develop from changes in American society due to changes in our cultural character or intrinsic changes in the concept of religion itself (Dawson, 1998).

On the other hand simply defining NRMs as religious movements lacking affiliation with mainstream religions, or non-religious groups as “cults” becomes controversial regarding terminology. Furthermore, delineating “cults” from “destructive cults” is problematic in that individual subjectivity can render the two terms synonymous, and not all groups perceived as “cults” use harmful high pressure tactics (Langone, 1991). A totalist cult can be identified as “a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethical, manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control” (West, 1990, p. 130).

While Alcoholic’s Anonymous (AA) may be perceived by some as a *cult* for its zealous implementation of an ideology, it would be disingenuous at best to consider AA synonymous with the Aum Shinrikyo *cult* that in 1995 murdered 12 people and injured

5,500 others in a Tokyo subway (Galanter, 1999; Mullins, 1997). The controversy is not assuaged by assigning the former or the latter the term *charismatic group*, as the literature suggest takes place when there is a groping for descriptive terms to replace the term *cult* (Langone, 1991). If AA were a *cult* it would be a *good* one, as it has a successful worldwide program for alcoholics (Galanter, 1999), whereas the *cult* of Aum Shinrikyo has been indicted for crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and illegal production of various drugs

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/aums.html>)

The traumatic conclusion of cults such as The People's Temple (Barker, 1986), Heaven's Gate (Roberts, Hollifield, & McCarty, 1998), and the Branch Davidians (McCarthy, 1999), dramatically demonstrate that further research is needed in the area of cult awareness. Gilmartin (1996), police psychologist, acknowledges that cultic activities may range from a legitimate desire to attain spiritual salvation to anti-government insurgency. However, there are remarkably similar characteristics among all cults. The strongest similarity has been identified as the *Lethal Triad*, which is composed of the socio-psychological dynamics of isolation, projection, and pathological anger.

The elements of the *Lethal Triad* are accomplished by *isolating* members from family or any not belonging to the group, which *projects* its cause upon an entity external to the group (this can be a person or the world in general) giving responsibility for decision making to their leader, and finally the *anger* results as members perceive themselves as victims of the outside entity (Gilmartin, 1996).

While the dynamics may seem overtly exhibited by the most radically militant quasi-guerilla faction according to Gilmartin's observation, the same dynamics can also be

found among innocuously docile religious devotees who neither carry assault weapons nor plots of implementing physical threats. Those who manage to exit such groups exhibit symptomatology that is present with “post-cult after effects” and *post-cult trauma* syndrome according to the work of Singer (1999) and others (Winocur, Whitney, Sorensen, Vaughn, & Foy, 1997). Some have argued that certain contemporary religions, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, may be considered a cult (Isser, 1991). This study examined the group known as Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the implications of separating from this religion.

Jehovah’s Witnesses spring from the teachings of Charles Taze Russell, a late nineteenth century publisher of religious literature. What he began as a small group calling itself the International Bible Students Association in 1874 under the auspices of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTB&TS) of Pennsylvania evolved into a world wide organization that adopted the name Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1931, with a world wide membership of almost six million (WTB&TS, 1917, p. 53) (<http://www.watchtower.org>).

The tenets of the group eschew critical thinking as something abhorrent, and independent thinking as anything that thinks critically of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (*The Watchtower*, January 15, 1983, p. 22). Jehovah’s Witnesses are not just requested to follow such direction they are “required” to do so, as they are taught to believe that God uses the WTB&TS as a “channel” that speaks in God’s stead (*The Watchtower*, 1983).

The available scientific research on Jehovah’s Witnesses is very limited. In a study conducted by McDonald and Lockett (1983) on the subject “Religious affiliation and psychiatric diagnoses,” the authors cite John Spencer (1975) in an earlier study saying,

“Jehovah’s Witnesses were represented three times more frequently in schizophrenia than the general population, and four times more frequently in paranoid schizophrenia” (McDonald & Luckett, 1983, p. 15; Spencer, 1975). A formal study of this population may reveal the psychosocial implications of those who leave this particular group.

As stated previously, Gilmartin identified a common thread between cultic groups as the socio-psychological dynamic of isolation (Gilmartin, 1996). A group that imposes social isolation as a prime directive does so with the implied purpose of creating dependence on the organization for social support to the degree that membership in good standing is based on following the organization’s directive. Social isolation is one of the prime directives of Jehovah’s Witnesses for they see friendship with the world as a threat to “friendship” with God, such that members are taught to withdraw from the community at large (WTB&TS, 1973, p. 129).

The Watchtower literature teaches, “If we manifest the world’s *spirit*, share its worldly *viewpoint* of life, then we identify ourselves as friends of the world, not of God [this author’s italics] (WTB&TS, 1973, p. 128). Thus, the organization segregates its members from the rest of the world with a theology that “condemn[s] everyone else” (Marty, 1991, p. 355) and affecting their “social” isolation. Social isolation may carry with it the implicit directive to be dependent on the organization for social support to the degree that any support from without the organization is a violation of the directive to be no part of the world. Thus, exiting the group may also carry with it issues of abandonment and isolation.

The purpose of this study was to gather data that explored the reasons for and effects of exiting the Jehovah's Witnesses, and to what extent if any, such an experience has impacted lives.

The research questions that this study addressed were: 1) What are the issues that influence a person's decision to exit Jehovah's Witnesses, and 2) what, if any, are the psychosocial effects of leaving Jehovah's Witnesses?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historical Development of Jehovah's Witnesses

The religion known today as Jehovah's Witnesses developed from the work of Charles Taze Russell who formed his own organization in 1872. That organization, however, did not adopt a denominational name until 1931, when the president of the legal corporation, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, announced publicly that they would henceforth be known as Jehovah's Witnesses (Beckford, 1975). An examination of the ideology of Jehovah's Witnesses will show that they have roots in the development of the first century concepts of "millenarianism" and "Adventism," and the specific period in ante bellum America known as the "Great Awakening" (Brown, 1952; Lippy & Williams, 1988; Wilson, 1963).

Millennialism

Millennial theology places the fate of humanity in "divine intervention" by means of the literal earth becoming the Kingdom of God; that intervention is generally accepted by theologians as bringing a "state of peace and blessedness [that] will last a thousand years--the millennium--and will be followed by the final judgment" (Brown, 1952, p. 441). Eschatology is the branch of theology that deals with end of the world issues, of which Adventism is a significant part. Adventism is grounded in Hebrew

and Christian roots, with the specific belief in the second coming of Christ, and a belief that a great separating will take place between the righteous and the wicked prior to establishment of the millennial Kingdom (Brown, 1952).

These were the basic tenets of Charles Taze Russell along with other millennial religions that originated the religion known as Jehovah's Witnesses. Both a charismatic speaker and a radical millenarian, he quickly departed from the views of popular Adventism in American religion to present his own interpretation maintaining control of his organization up to the time of his death in 1916 (Lippy & Williams, 1988; Botting, 1982).

Early History of Jehovah's Witnesses

Russell was born on February 16, 1852. By time he reached the age of 16 he challenged his Presbyterian upbringing by joining a local Congregationalist Church (Botting, 1982; Penton, 1985). It was also around the period of 1869-1870 that Russell was influenced by the public speaking of Jonas Wendell, a Second Adventist, along with the writings of William Miller, a New England Baptist, whose eschatological computations placed the second advent of Christ in the mid 1800s (Penton, 1985; Botting, 1982; Brown, 1952). He did not become a true follower of Wendell, however.

Between 1870 and 1872 Russell began to organize his own Bible study group after parting from Wendell over disagreement on the manner with which the second advent of Christ would occur. In 1872 he formed his own organization as the International Bible Student's Association (Brown, 1952; Botting, 1982; Lippy & Williams, 1988; Melton, 1993). Soon thereafter Russell studied the writings of George

Storrs, a Methodist Episcopalian and New England abolitionist, and other independent Adventists such as N. H. Barbour and J. H. Paton (Harwood, 1962; Penton, 1985; Botting, 1982; Beckford, 1975; Melton, 1993;).

The turning point of Russell's religious development came from his association with one of those teachers: Dr. Nelson H. Barbour. Russell initiated the relationship with Barbour when he happened upon Barbour's publication, *Herald of the Morning* in 1875.

Russell accepted Barbour's belief that Christ had descended from heaven in 1874, and Russell was so moved that he accepted an offer to invest money in Barbour's publishing the *Herald of the Morning* (Beckford, 1975). This relationship continued until 1878 when Russell published an article in the *Herald*, which challenging certain aspects of Barbour's teaching and they ended their association together. In 1879 Russell published the first issue of his new magazine, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, which is still in print as of 2001.

Russell insisted that his organization not adopt an identity as a religious denomination, yet it became common among others to refer to his followers as "Russellites." He maintained that he and his associates were simply Christians and preferred that they be known as members of the "Church of Christ," which is the only name he would accept had it not been claimed by another (Beckford, 1975; Penton, 1985).

Russell's work continued to flourish and his organization grew. During the first ten-years of publishing *Zion's Watch Tower* subscribers reached 10,000. By 1907 it grew to 45,000. Circulation of Russell's *Millennial Dawn* (the series was renamed in

1906 to *Studies in the Scriptures*) in 1891 was 85,000, which rose in 1908 to 728,474 (Beckford, 1975); volume I of this particular publication series became popular as *The Divine Plan of the Ages* and reached a circulation of 4,817,000 by the time of his death in 1916. During his lifetime almost 20,000,000 copies of his books were produced and distributed throughout the world (Penton, 1985).

Roots in Millennialism

The content of Russell's writing is a continuation of what he had gleaned from Adventist preachers who indoctrinated him into millennialism based on the work of William Miller (1782-1849) (Zygmunt, 1970). Miller, a religious enthusiast, concluded "that the Second Advent would occur about the year 1843" (Brown, 1952, p. 453) thus bringing the end of the world and the beginning of the new millennium. When the date came and went without event his followers, Millerites, disbanded and it was the end of his movement (New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990). Between Russell and his contemporary mentors recalculations for the return of Christ were set around 1873-74, and when that did not occur they adopted a "spiritual" rather than "fleshly" return of Christ, along with the "harvest" of earthly saints to be taken in "rapture" by 1878 (Penton, 1985; Zygmunt, 1970).

Beckford (1975), Botting (1982), and Penton (1985) agree that Russell had no intentions of being identified as the leader of a religious organization, and he eschewed latching onto a name that would do that, yet the movement that he lead took on a collective identity that

conceive[d] . . . itself as a divinely chosen spiritual elite, selected from the ranks of dedicated Christians to be advanced beneficiaries of God's Plan of Salvation and auxiliary instruments in its fuller execution. (Zygmunt, 1970, p. 929)

Russell explained that members of his movement were, “spirit begotten sons of God,” the “Bride of Christ,” due to inherit and rule from heaven as a “Royal Priesthood” waiting for spiritual metamorphosis when they would be taken from the earth in rapture. The demeanor of the group was such that it sought to “perfect itself spiritually for its exalted future role and to act as God’s agency for ‘harvesting’ the little flock of saints . . . expressed particularly in its cult of ‘character development’” (p. 929).

At the time of his death Russell did not leave provision in his will for a specific successor, and in fact in his will he had specifically divided the power of a succeeding president by giving his voting rights in the Watch Tower Society to a group of women (whom he knew were excluded from holding office), and his editorial rights as president to a five member board. Joseph Franklin Rutherford rescinded both orders when he was elected president. Rutherford was first elected president at the Annual General Meeting in 1917, and then again, after much opposition from prominent Bible Students in the organization, at the Annual General Meeting in 1918. At that time fifty members succeeded from the Watch Tower movement as a form of protest aimed at Rutherford, and by 1923 all opposition to the new president died out (Beckford, 1975).

The early history of the International Bible Student’s Association established by Russell set the tenor of the movement. The next thirty years after the death of Russell brought the institutionalization of it. During this period “the sect’s doctrinal, cultic, and ethical systems were elaborated and integrated” (Zygmunt, 1970, p. 932). The new president took control of the editing and production of the Society’s publications, even authoring many of its major works.

Implications of Social Isolationism

Rutherford further distanced his reforms from the “Russellite” movement by emphatically instilling separateness of the membership “from the rest of society, by denying ‘character development’ was the principal end of their religious life and by asserting that they constituted a ‘peculiar people’ having distinctive evangelical tasks to perform” (Beckford, 1975, p. 29). In 1931 Rutherford formalized a break from Russell’s legacy by molding the “Bible Students” into a cohesive group under the collective title of “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” and in doing so established the “spiritual status and life prospects of various categories of supporters, members and non-members of the Watch Tower movement” (Beckford, 1975, p. 30).

Jehovah’s Witnesses during the late 1930s moved towards the conceptualization of collective introversion separating them from the greater society within which they lived and carried on their daily lives. The social implications of collective introversion predisposed Jehovah’s Witnesses to depend upon the Watch Tower Society for basic services, in effect isolating themselves as a group from outside influence (Beckford, 1975). As one of his final reforms in the organization Rutherford declared in June of 1938 that God had taken control of the Watch Tower Society, and that their organization had become a “theocratic” arrangement. This declaration served notice to all members that they were now accountable to the Society’s leaders and that it would be blasphemy to disagree with anything that came from them

Deviation from the Society’s codes and programmes [sic] would henceforth entail ‘everlasting death’ because loyalty to the theocratic Society had become a test of a person’s spiritual merit and fitness to survive Armageddon. (Beckford, 1975, p. 39)

The Psychology of Religion

Theoretical Perspectives

In the late 1950s Carl G. Jung (1958) wrote in his book *the undiscovered self*, about the conflict between socio-political movements and religion. He wrote that the State ruled from a worldly perspective, and religions teach authority opposed to the world. To elaborate this he also draws a distinction between religion and creed; Creed is defined as religion that compromises to State rule, and “*religion* expresses a subjective relationship to certain metaphysical, extramundane factors” (p. 30). Therefore, religion is a powerful force that motivates people morally apart from the influence of the physical world.

According to Stark (1980) the subject of religion has often been treated as either pathological or originating from pathological states of mind. Stark offers Freud’s (1928) argument that “religion is a kind of universal obsessional [sic] neurosis, if not an outright delusion” (p. 247). However, Stark also adds that William James (1902), philosopher and psychologist, “also believed much religiousness has a psychopathological origin, although, unlike Freud, he considered this a blessing in disguise” (p. 247). Rather than attribute all forms of religious commitment to be pathological, Stark (1980) cautions, “To put the argument another way, it is extremely important to distinguish between what could best be called conventional religious commitment and extremist or pathological forms of commitment” (p. 247).

On the other hand, Carl Jung’s observation in treating patients is that at the root of the presenting problems is the issue of religion. He states, “Among all my patients in the second half of life . . . none of them has been really healed who did not regain his

religious outlook” (Jung, 1933, p. 229). That said, humans have a propensity to live with an overarching sense of meaning to life, and in Jung’s perspective religion provides such meaning, at least in the patients he references, which is both good and useful.

In order to understand how religion functions in an individual’s life Brown (1987), observed that psychologists have examined psychological implications of religious belief. Brown asserts that in any research “religion . . . is an undoubted social fact that both religious and non-religious people must come to terms with, because it can operate as a cognitive filter and as a focus of values, habits and social attitudes” (p. 121).

Sociologists and psychologists have different perspectives regarding religion; the sociologist concerns are with religion and society while psychologists focus on individuals and their religion (Glock & Stark, 1965; Allport, 1950).

Defining reality is a subjective matter for all but the individual committed to religious perspective. The experience of religion becomes the “unalterable shape of reality . . . [a virtual] aura of factuality . . . non-hypothetical truth . . . genuine reality . . . [and] formulations of ultimate reality” (Gallus, 1972, p. 545). For very religious people reality is explained by the nature of their religious faith. For Jehovah’s Witnesses, “faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld” (Hebrews 11:1, NWT).

Religion and the Individual

At some point in his or her human development the psychologically healthy religious person embraces a faith that best supports a homogeneous world-view. For

those that do so, as seen above, reality is fixed and defined by the religious experience. Early concepts of the psychology of religion place the individual on the continuum of human development, which includes *individuation* (Stoops, 1905). *Individuation* is also a Jungian concept of personality development whereby a person balances the unconscious mind of the individual and ego thereby grasping a higher order of fulfillment (Monte, 1991).

In the first half of life the individual's task is to strengthen the ego, and take a place in the world through interpersonal relationships, and to fulfill a sense of duty to society. At some midpoint or the second half of life the individual sets in motion the reclamation of undeveloped or incomplete aspects of the self, and this is what Jung call the process of *individuation*. Without striving for perfection, one gradually gains completion and wholeness, accepting both positive and negative aspects of personality, and adopts a system of ethics (Corsini & Wedding, 1995).

The theological perspective on early human development is similar, yet with the addition of individual *will*. We instinctually strengthen ourselves individualistically for survival as organisms in the early stages of development, yet this "phase of life is not the whole of life; it is only a stage of development" (Stoops, 1905, p. 515). What distinguishes humans from animals is the realization that the individual is a member of a larger life, a social life, and it is the function of *will* that drives one to develop volition and reflection, thus harnessing the instinctual side of the individual's aspects of being.

Therefore, it is the coupling of the unity of instinct tempered by the unity of self-conscious will that leads one to a "readjustment between the individual self and the deeper life of the world . . . [which] . . . in theology is known by the term 'conversion'

[being] . . . a natural, moral, universal and necessary process at the stage when life pivots over from an auto-centric to an hetero-centric basis” (Stoops, 1905, p. 516). Thus, this sense of conversion is the process by which the individual clarifies attitudinally being not just a social creature or an endowed individual, but identifies with God as the source of life connoting religion. This healthy process is facilitated by the use of free *will*.

Secularization and the New Religious Movements

Secularization

Secularism began as a movement during the Renaissance intended to shift issues of control from ecclesiastical to civil or lay use (Secularism, 1990); some secularization theorists suggest that as science ascends religion descends (Yamane, 1997). Since the Renaissance secularization has continued as a process throughout history.

The theory of secularization, however, is controversial and no conclusive consensus exists in the sociological study of religions among theorists of secularization. Yamane (1997) enters the conflagration with an alternative theory or synthesis of “old” traditional secularization and a “new” postsecularization, “which retains the core insights of the ‘old’ view and incorporates the legitimate criticisms of the ‘new’ view, thereby transcending the apparent antimonies of the two paradigms . . . [as] neosecularization” (pp. 109 & 110), or a new paradigm shift, identifying theoretical as examples, Hertzke (1988), Demerath and Williams (1992), and Casanova (1994).

At the core of the controversy definitions of secularization vary from the general to the specific depending on the source. Maguire says, “In general, the theory holds that science, rationality, institutional differentiation, and technological progress combine to

undermine the influence of religion in social life” (Maguire, 1998, p. 171). Wilson (1975) also generalizes that, “religious thinking, practices, and institutions lose their social significance” (79) due to the process of secularization.

Tschannen (1991) develops a specific paradigm based on is that while theorists who maintain similar concepts of secularization, yet he admits no single theoretical framework can be distilled from all of them. Going into depth the author charts the theories of Luckman (1970, 1987), Berger (1969), Wilson (1976), Martin (1978), Fenn (1970), Parsons (1964), and Bellah (1970) as some of the leading references in the controversy. The basic structure of Tschannen’s paradigm focuses on the similarities between theorists. At the core of this paradigm are the three elements of *differentiation*, *rationalization*, and *worldliness*. The core element of *differentiation* originates with the separation of Church and State. As this separation occurred institutions were born from a non-religious origin through *rationalization* to meet specific social functions independent of religious control. At the same time the impact on the Church is such that society imposes its *worldliness* in such a way that the traditional and established religious order must adapt so that it will survive, thus loosing the hold or control it once had on the global community (Tschannen, 1991, pp. 400-401).

As a result of the shift in power from ecclesiastical to secular social stressors increased. Thus, Robbins and Anthony (1979) postulate the rise of New Religious Movements as an answer to scintillating “crisis in community in contemporary society” (p. 78). Such dramatic changes in the structure of American culture, as set forth in the debate among secularization theorists, which Hadden (1987) suggests, “is nested in an even broader theory of modernization” (p. 588). In effect Fisher’s (1999) point of

departure is that New Religious Movements are “a reaction against secularization, industrialization, consumerism and the counter youth culture” (p. 51).

Just as clearly as Truzzi (1970) sees demystification as causing an insurgence of playful interest in the occult and Satanic Ritual Magic, Wilson (1975) also sees Jehovah’s Witnesses as invoking, promoting and sponsoring the same concept of demystification, with the exception that the latter are serious (Beckford, 1975).

The most obvious observation is that for generations Jehovah’s Witnesses have been consistently and vigorously mounting a campaign of resistance against the incursions of secularization and pluralism in their opposition to all forms of ecumenism. (p. 217)

By way of contrast Truzzi (1970) views the mass character of the occult as a means to purging old fears about myths, which engender “a naturalistic rationalism, [and] a scientific view of the universe” (p. 30). Furthermore, Beckford (1975) concludes that the movement of Jehovah’s Witnesses, “ridicules the marginal differentiation . . . of Christian outlooks . . . and the current vogue for ‘peace of mind’ . . . which . . . they consider to be the Satanic corruption and emasculation of Christianity” (p. 217). In effect as Witnesses become more exclusive and separate from society they actually contribute to the process of *differentiation* and *pluralization*, thus having a catalytic impact on secularization as a process (p. 218).

New Religious Movements

Billings and Scott (1994) argue that sociologists recognize that religion has historically functioned to both challenge and legitimize political power. On the religious front, advocates of orthodox concepts of transcendent authority are united politically to oppose progressives who seek to redefine faith in a “struggle to achieve or

maintain the power to define reality” (p. 176). The authors, however, conclude that regardless of the conflicts New Religious Movements (NRMs) accomplish both political opposition and accommodation, particularly in developing societies (p. 190).

Hadden (2000), a professor the Department of Sociology at the University of Virginia, admits in his construction of an Internet web page designed to examine, explore and extrapolate teachings on New Religious Movements that at “some time every religions was new”

(<http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jkh8x/soc257/welcome/welcome.htm>). Wuthnow (1982) places the first signs of New Religious Movements as beginning around the 1830s and 1840s, with the numbers of new religious groups rising to over a thousand during the 1960s and 1970s (p. 48).

Robbins and Anthony (1979) follow the hypothesis that the, rise of new religious movements are a continuation of secularization. Marcello Truzzi (1970) supported this hypothesis in his analysis of the revival of occultism such as witchcraft and astrology as, “a demystification-process of what were once fearful and awe-inspiring dark secrets” (p. 29). The authors further contend that the New Religious Movement of the 1970s took on many exotic forms, and these cults succeed, “precisely because the [American] culture is secularized . . . they are themselves a religious response to the secularization of society, but they are a marginal phenomenon” (Wilson, 1975, pp. 81-82).

Wilson (1976) also acknowledges that the trend toward non-traditional spirituality is evidence supporting the historical significance of secularization. According to Wilson (1976) the rise in the number of unorthodox forms of religion are,

“a confirmation of the process of secularization. They indicate the extent to which religion has become inconsequential to modern society” (p. 96). Wilson (1975) argues that, “While the decline of religion is taken for granted . . . experts keep the debate alive . . . to show that things are not quite what they seem” (p. 77). What fuels the debate is insistence on the use of statistical evidence regarding the decline of church attendance, yet Wilson observes that the meanings of “church membership and religious observance” (p. 79) are inconsistent between differing societies, and also between denominations. As Wilson says, “The secularization debate is partly about terminology” (p. 83).

Sects and Cults

Church and Sect

Jung (1933) draws a distinction between religion and creed; Berger (1954) contrasts church and sect. The New Religious Movement has created a phenomenon that exceeded what sociologists had been able to identify with terms that the layman can easily understand (Wilson, 1982). On the surface Berger (1954) sets the Church as an authority figure of power; the Church is both “a political institution with normative order, and . . . a political institution capable of using force over a continuing period of time” (p. 468).

One can become a compulsory member of a church as the result of family tradition, and Berger (1954) does not see such membership as being any statement regarding the quality of the individual members (p. 468). A sect’s membership, by way of contrast, is formed voluntarily based on religious and ethical qualifications, and

herein the distinction is that one can be “born” into a church, but for the most part one “joins” a sect (Berger, 1954). The church is also primarily a “social group,” which sticks close to the national, economic, and cultural concerns of society, and conversely the sect is a minority demographic choosing separatism, which is semi-ascetic in nature to the world (p. 472).

While both the terms church and the sect operate as classifications of religions or organizations that, as seen above, gather membership, the overarching sociological typology of the two has as a distinction the level of stringency or demands placed upon respective members (Iannaccone, 1992). A group with stringent deviant norms at odds with the dominant culture is a sect, whereas groups that mirror the norms of culture are churches (p. 283).

According to Marty (1960) American religion has been limited in its global perspective to a “conventional tripartite division of . . . Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish” (p. 126), thus, he observes this view has been criticized for not including denominations that do not fit into such a division. Furthermore, the author divides Christian religions into three clusters or forces; Protestantism and Roman Catholicism make-up the first two forces, and sects and cults cluster as a “third force” (Marty, 1960). What sets the latter apart from the former is non-conformity to mainstream systems of belief. Of this drift from the mainstream Marty (1960) says “The more isolated, intransigent, withdrawn . . . the less it has come to be regarded as a normative religious expression for America” (p. 128).

Cults

Wilson (1982), however, does not accept the terminology of “sect” to be descriptive of the New Religious Movement; he also does not apply the term “cult” to New Religious Movements, but opts for “new movements” in affect siding with sociologists. He defines a cult as “a movement that breaches the exclusivism normal in the Christian tradition” (p. 17), which he appropriately credits to Wallis (1975).

Marty (1960) considers sect, as presented above, synonymously with cult. His point of departure from this line of reasoning is that negatively oriented sects isolate membership from competing value systems, whereas positively oriented cults “gather around charismatic persons or clans . . . that provide surrogates for interpersonal relationships or attachment to significant persons in an apparently depersonalizing society” (p. 129). Likewise Iannaccone (1992) combines sects with cults as containing deviant norms, which distance members from prevailing culture (p. 283). Yet these narrow definitions of cult phenomena do not clarify its meaning.

Lifton (1961) distinctly identifies psychological themes under the domain of *ideological totalism*, which is the construct that drives destructive cult mentality. He states, “Any ideology . . . may be carried by its adherents in a totalistic direction . . . and where totalism exists, a religion, a political movement, or even a scientific organization becomes little more than an exclusive cult” (Lifton, 1961, p. 419).

According to West (1990) a totalist cult can be identified as a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethical, manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control . . . designed to advance the goals of the group’s leaders, to the possible or actual detriment of members, their families, or the community. (West, 1990, p. 130)

West (1990) goes on to explain three specific characteristics of a totalist cult, which help to narrow down the definition of just what is a cult. These characteristics are:

Excessively zealous, unquestioning commitment to the group and its leadership by the members; Manipulation and exploitation of members; Harm or the danger of harm. (p. 130)

The author clarifies that this definition generally pertains to groups that conform to Lifton's (1961) system of *ideological totalism*, and that there is no specific category within which to insert every suspected sect, commune, or cult (group); the mitigating quality of change over time tends to stratify groups considered cults at varying levels of conformity to the above definition, even when totalistic.

The similarities between West's (1990) definition of *cult* and Lifton's (1961) use of *totalism* stem from the latter's concept of *thought reform* derived from Communist Chinese indoctrination techniques that commonly became known as *brainwashing*. The term brainwashing actually comes from a news media person's interpretation of trying to define just what was behind the *thought reform* concept that Lifton was working on (Lifton).

The primary psychological theme that sets-up the means to begin the indoctrination process above is *milieu control*, the control of the individual's environment, which can be the physical or social setting wherein the indoctrination takes place. In the totalist environment of Lifton (1961), deprivation of communication with the outside world and external information are distinctive

indications of an “exclusive cult” (p. 419). This characteristic of control has also been observed in extremist groups by Gilmartin (1996), which he identifies as a group process that explains collective behavior

This process is based on the social-psychological dynamics of the Lethal Triad. The components of the triad--isolation, projection, and pathological anger--represent the basic social forces common to radical groups, regardless of the content of their rhetoric or the nature of their practices. (Gilmartin, 1996, p. 2)

Social isolation from family, friends, and support systems that do not reciprocate the sentiments of the group collective behavior is also an attribute of a cult (Singer & Addis, 1992).

West (1990) uses the example of the death of those of the People’s Temple at Jonestown to demonstrate that the old and the young may be involved in cults. He narrows down the average age of potential cult members to be, “between 18 and 30 . . . [as] especially subject to cult recruitment” (p. 131), and that there is no common psychological, or educational profile to indicate susceptibility to cult involvement other than saying that, “Ignorance of the ways in which groups can manipulate individuals is a relatively general characteristic of cult victims--until it is too late” (p. 131). He further estimates that 10 million Americans over the last 20 years have at sometime been active in cultic groups. It is for this reason that he has written on the subject from a Public Health perspective suggesting that cult involvement may have reached epidemic proportions. (p. 133)

West also details a list of persuasive techniques used by cults that also serves to help identify what a cult is, such as

Ready-made answers and decisions are being almost forced upon the recruits . . . flattery . . . isolation . . . elimination of outside information and influence . . .

use of thought-stopping clichés . . . closed system of logic . . . restriction of reflective thinking . . . automatic submission to directives . . . stifling resistance and negativity . . . response to fear in a way that greater fear is often aroused . . . strong focus on the leader. (pp. 136-137)

The above list delineates methods used primarily in a context of social engagement and personal choice establishing a *victim* or *willful* participant assessment of cult involvement. The techniques of *thought reform*, as explored by Ofshe and Singer (1986), through the use of “coordinated programs of coercive influence and behavior control” (p. 3), draw similarities between such techniques used in China, the Soviet Union, American cultic growth, and psychotherapy organizations. These authors assert that targets of recruitment encounter psychological attack in the areas of *peripheral* and *central* elements of self. The authors clarify these such that

Peripheral elements of self are defined as self-evaluations of the adequacy or correctness of public and judgmental aspects of a person’s life (e.g., social status, role performance, conformity to societal norms, political and social opinions, taste, etc.). We define as central elements of self, self-evaluation of the adequacy or correctness of a person’s intimate life and confidence in perception of reality (e.g., relations with family, personal aspirations, sexual experience, traumatic life events, religious beliefs, estimates of the motivations of others, etc.). (Ofshe & Singer, 1986, p. 4)

Taking these into account will discuss how the *person in environment*, is impacted by the possible deleterious effects of cult involvement.

Exiting Cults

The existence of cults is neither endemic only to American culture, nor a relatively recent development. La Barre (1971), tracks the development of cults, on the heels of acculturation, over a period of two hundred years across Africa, Europe, Eurasia, the Pacific Islands, North and South America, and Australia (La Barre).

Tracking the collision of European and Native cultures around the world, La Barre (1971) describes a reflex like response in human kind to a sort of “culture shock” that spins crisis oriented cults as diverse and far-flung , from the Ghost Dance of the Native American plains tribes, to the Cargo cults of Melanesia; and he does so using the phrase *crisis cults*, to explain “any group reaction to crisis, chronic or acute, that is cultic . . . [which] may be political, economic, cultural, historical or psychological” (p. 11), it becomes apparent that cultic influence is rather endemic to humankind. His definition of *cultic* is “the indisposition to accept either disruptive feedback or the ego-critique of experience” (p. 11). It is this notion of *feedback*, the same sort that systems theory has, whether disruptive or constructive, that gives the cult and its members cohesion, creating a proliferation from culture to culture (p. 15).

The Cult and Social Systems Theory

Galanter (1999) compares the development of cultic groups with general systems theory by means of an *input, throughput, output* modality that has at its core the intent to transform people, by way of conversion, as product (Galanter, 1999, p. 93). Transformation of raw materials into useful products is the primary task of manufacturing organizations, and the end product defines the very purpose of the organization. Applying this theoretical model to the meaning and purpose behind the existence of cults, Galanter shows the primary task to be two-fold; the cults primary task is connected to a messianic vision that the collective members eagerly prepare for, and this task evolves into the recruiting (input) of more members to the cult, feeding the messianic vision and fueling the body of members (93).

The transformational process (throughput) implemented by cults is disruptive to psychological stability. This period can include use of emotional flooding techniques on new recruits, and may involve the full resources of the group translating into a *marathon* effect that may last from a few days to months of intensive indoctrination (Ofshe & Singer, 1986, p. 11).

We become motivated by that which drives us to get what we want; more so, how we control our reality is based on our perceptions of what controls our behavior, or the source of our *locus of control* (Glassel & Wubbolding, 1995). There is a connection between dysfunctional behaviors, and a high correlation with an external locus of control; conversely, one is more in touch with the causes of personal reality, and concomitant feelings of being in charge or control of one's reality when there is an internal locus of control (p. 305).

Within high control groups, such as cults, the intended purpose of indoctrination is to create an external locus of control, as opposed an internal (personal) locus of control. When the attention of the recruit is focused outside of him or herself the transformation becomes manifest as (output) conformity to the group regardless of personal propensities, predilections, or prerogatives (Galanter, 1999). As the feedback from the new members regarding the results of the *output* comes back to the organization, the leadership monitors the feedback, and prepares for another cycle, or another phase of *input-throughput-output* which suits the rational of the members , and is embraced completely (p. 97).

Groups that maintain a strong coercive monitoring system over the membership process of *feedback* are capable of actual dichotomous shifts in direction, dialog or doctrine. To the uninformed observer, or the recalcitrant member the shifts are perceived as contradictory agendas, while the active body of membership willingly and wholeheartedly follow the new directives (Galanter, 1999. p. 97). The strategy is the construct of a closely tuned monitoring system that is neither capricious nor cavalier, but rather very much the undertow of membership sentiments. By the execution of *identification* (with the aggressive leadership) and suppression of *autonomy* (concepts of free choice), on the part of the member body, another cycle is begun at the end of the *feedback* phase that starts with indoctrination to the new illumination of truth; deviation of any kind is punished with psychological distress (pp. 98-101).

The final element in this systems approach to social groups such as cults is *boundary control*. Setting boundaries is particularly important in order to keep out dangerous influence from dissidents, and any information that is detrimental to the groups transformational process. In the case of children who ignite an interest in joining a charismatic group, and parents who become frantic in efforts to *rescue* their offspring from the group communication usually breaks down when the parents forcefully and aggressively intervene. The compelling systems functions that hold the parents at bay and the children entrenched towards compliance of the group are *transformation* and *boundary control* (Galanter, 1999, pp. 105-109).

Deprogramming and Exit Counseling

Families and individuals concerned with cult involvement of children or relatives, gave rise to interventions with significant family members who became

enmeshed in cults, and from this cadre immersed what is known as *deprogramming* (Langone & Chambers, 1991). Originally, this type of intervention was forced upon the cult member, and has been said to violate basic civil rights (p. 135), and in some instances contributed to continued membership (West, 1990) very much as the breaking of boundaries and the challenging of *transformation* does, as seen in Galanter's (1999) model of social systems theory applied to cult participation and recruitment (1990, p. 92) brings attention to the controversy behind deprogramming in the Tertiary Prevention approach of his Public Health Model (West, 1990, p. 143). He also delineates the difference between deprogramming and *exit counseling* by addressing the latter as a form of reentry counseling (p. 144). Langone (1991) concurs that exit counseling has become the more acceptable modality of intervention, and for the most part has replaced forced deprogramming (p. 135).

The primary difference between the two modalities of deprogramming and exit counseling is that the latter is a voluntary process, whereas the former is usually practiced by means of restraint (Giambalvo, 1995). Exit counseling is considered the "legal treatment approach" (West, 1990, p. 144), and is primarily concerned with former members who have initiated separation themselves.

Exit Counseling

Goldberg (1993) worked with former cult members in a therapeutic alliance as a social worker for 16 years when she wrote that therapy with ex-cultist was dramatically different than therapy with persons who had not been a member of a cult. She said

... cult life can have a traumatic impact on cult members. In working with a former cultist, a therapist who minimizes the cult experiences and sees all cult

actions exclusively as indicative of experiences in early life and not . . . due to the manipulations of the cult leader is further victimizing the former cultist. (p. 233)

Furthermore, she observed that after working with former cultists who had exited as little as two to three months, “continued to show the character traits and hold some of the attitudes of their cultic group” (Goldberg, p. 234).

Giambalvo (1993) and Markowitz (1993) also encountered former cult members that had presented indications that effects of membership persisted even after as much as three to five years (Giambalvo, p. 148; Markowitz, p. 298). Some of the emotional and psychological disturbances observed by exit counselors such as Giambalvo and Markowitz are

Dissociation (floating): involuntary drifting off into altered states; difficulty Concentrating: loss of critical thinking; poor judgment; memory loss; anxiety; Guilt: for leaving friends in the group, for having caused trouble for their families; fear: of retribution from God, from the group itself, and from the threats invariably made by the leader toward members who leave. (Markowitz, 1993, p. 287)

There are a number of different interpretations to *stages* of development surrounding the exiting process (Markowitz, 1993; Martin, 1993).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was an exploratory investigation into the issues behind a person's initial decision to exit from Jehovah's Witnesses, and psychosocial effects thereafter exiting the group. A qualitative survey method was used. This design was chosen due to the impracticable nature of random assignment; there is no clear means available to access a pool of subjects to form two groups representative of each other.

Sample

The sampling method to be used in this study is a non-random/non-probability sample type; the participants was self-selected. The subtype was that of availability or convenience sample through the use of researcher soliciting, referral and *snowballing* subjects for the research. The population was adults who are members of Jehovah's Witnesses who have exited at least three months from the beginning of the research, and members who have exited within a period of 6 years. The projected sample size was 15-20. The sample will be recruited via the Internet.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted interviews with the subjects in a face-to-face encounter or by use of the telephone. Subjects were initially contacted by means of the Internet through an invitation to participate in this research posted on public mailing

lists, such as found on world wide web locations: watchtower-observer@observer.org, jesus-witnesses@egroups.com, ex-cult-support@egroups.com, pioneeroutreach@egroups.com, spiritual-abuse-recovery@egroups.com, and EXJW-HEALING-owner@egroups.com. The researcher placed a request for participants in this study by posting such on each mailing list. The request stated that the purpose of participation was to explore each participant's reasons for desiring to exit Jehovah's Witnesses and the effects of such a decision. Those who expressed a desire to take part in this research were then be asked to provide a phone number that the researcher may contact him or her. Those who agreed to participate were Emailed the letter of consent, which each signed and mail via "land mail" to the researcher.

Once the necessary letters of consent have been signed and returned the subjects were contacted by phone and an appointment to meet was arranged if it was logistically feasible, or a time was set aside to conduct the interview over the phone. The interview was recorded verbatim by hand.

Instrument

The data was collected in the form of interviews conducted via phone, face-to-face depending on the logistics and limitations of the participant's particular circumstances. The questions produced for this section were open-ended with attendant probing questions. The questions used were related to the subjects subject experience of the exiting process. A series of 4 questions were asked to represent the immediate or residual effects of *exiting* on the activities of daily living (ADL). At this time there is no scale to rate levels of functionality due to psychosocial impact for this population. This study gathered data to assess and develop the direction that further research on this

sample population will take. Though the Organization that the subjects belonged to is known to be predominantly white, there is also non-white Hispanic membership, African American membership, and other non-white people of various heritages. The cultural differences of the participants was revealed through demographic questioning at the end of the interview.

Data Analysis

This study will use qualitative method of content analysis looking for common themes utilizing metaphors, and narrative structure to tell the story of the respondents. The limitations of this study are that the instrument constructed by the researcher concomitant with qualitative research and a non-random sample has no universality and no generalizability.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study is focused on the experiences of members of Jehovah's Witnesses who have already left the religion, or are in the process of doing so. For the purposes of this study *leave* or *leaving* the religion will be referred to as *exit* or *exiting*. *Exiting* also entails separation from any and all privileges of associating with members in good standing.

There were 16 participants in this study who were interviewed in person or by phone. The researcher will refer to the participants using pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Demographic Characteristics

Those who responded to be participants ranged in ages from 25-70 years old, (Table 1); the biological sex and ethnicity of the participants is also displayed in Table 1. The respondents are citizens of the contiguous United States of America. Of the 16 participants 15 were born in the United States of America, and 1 was born in Greece to parents who were naturalized citizens of the United States of America.

For the purposes of clarifying individual characteristics the responses to demographic questions 43, 44, and 45 are presented in Table 2. The true identity of the respondents has been concealed through the use of pseudonyms. The subjects were recruited as volunteers from all over the country.

TABLE 1.

Age, Sex, and Ethnicity of Respondents *N* = 16

<i>Age of Respondents</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
25-28	2	12.50
29-32	2	12.50
34-39	3	18.75
40-43	3	18.75
44-48	2	12.50
52-57	2	12.50
62-70	2	12.50
<i>Sex</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	11	68.75
Male	5	31.25
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
European Americans	12	75.00
Latino	3	18.75
Other	1	6.25

TABLE 2.

Individual Demographic Responses

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Treanna	25	Female.	Greek
Jamie	28	Female.	Caucasian.
Pablo	30	Male.	Hispanic
Miles	31	Male.	White/Caucasian.
Racine	34	Female.	White.
Marlene	39	Female.	Caucasian.
Stevie	39	Male.	White.
Wendy	40	Female.	White.
Carol	41	Female.	Caucasian.
Eric	43	Male.	White/Caucasian.
Betty	44	Female.	Hispanic
Robert	48	Male	Hispanic
Didi	52	Female.	Caucasian.
Stacey	57	Female.	Caucasian.
Liz	62	Female.	Caucasian.
Miranda	70	Female.	White/Caucasian

The Individual Significance of Being One of Jehovah's Witnesses

Childhood Experience as a Jehovah's Witness

The participants of this study were asked if he or she were *raised as a Jehovah's Witness*. Of all the respondents only 1 did not come into the Organization as a minor, Robert; he started going to meetings when he was 21 (see Table 3).

TABLE 3.

Childhood Experience as One of Jehovah's Witnesses <i>n</i> = 15		
<i>Age Childhood began as one of Jehovah's Witnesses</i>	#	%
Born as a Jehovah's Witness	6	37.50
1-4	5	31.25
5-8	2	12.50
9-12	1	6.25
13-14	1	6.25

According to the participants, being born or raised as a Jehovah Witness invokes a standard of social and psychological expectations quite different from the mainstream child raised in a traditional Protestant Christian setting. In mainstream religious settings a child is baptized as an infant, and does not officially become a member of the Church until some time in adolescence or thereafter.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not practice infant baptism; children of Jehovah's Witnesses do not get baptized until they are of an age that can reasonably understand the significance of the act. To Jehovah's Witnesses baptism is a symbolic gesture of dedication to their God. Whether or not the move to baptism is a willful choice for

Jehovah's Witnesses is revealed through the interview data, which is presented below.

The first question in the interview asked, *Were you raised as a Jehovah's Witness?* All the answers to this question were dependent upon the experience of the parents.

Betty, who was raised as a Jehovah Witness from the age of 14, experienced a major shift in her social life when her mother began to study with the religion. For Betty the experience was

Scary, because I had to leave my old life behind. No holidays; they were wrong and sinful. God would destroy me if I celebrated Christmas. I began to look at non-Jehovah's Witness relative suspiciously.

The common theme between the respondents expresses that for the child raised in Jehovah's Witnesses, school social life or the celebration of holidays are the issues.

Marlene expressed that the religion impinges on the social life of a child.

I didn't know anything else, and as a child it was very uncomfortable. Children naturally feel different, but when you are a Jehovah's Witness you are definitely different. School was difficult. Christmas. If there was a Christmas play or event I had to leave the room, because I wasn't allowed to participate. I couldn't attend school dances, and in my teens there was no such thing as dating. Only associating with Jehovah's Witnesses was allowed, you couldn't have friends who were not Witnesses.

Jamie could not recall her life being different from other non-Jehovah Witness children, yet at school the issues were the same.

In the early years I couldn't tell, no different I guess than any other child's life. It effected me when I got into school, and when the holidays came, or if there was a birthday party.

Pablo shares the sentiment:

At times it was a little difficult, 'cause at school you tend to stand out from the rest of the kids. At holidays some of the Witness parents would have the teacher put their kids out in the hall if there was something objectionable going on, like a birthday celebration.

Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to salute the Flag of their country; saluting the Flag is consider an act of worship. Miranda adds:

At first my life didn't seem to change much from before my folks started studying, but after a while, at school the flag issue and holidays became a difficult time for me. There was no difference at first with the family for the first three years; it became different after they got baptized. In fact, I was expelled from the second grade over not saluting the flag. That was during the war, and in 1941 patriotism was very prevalent. So, that was really hard on me, the flag issue.

Eric concurs about the Flag issue, and that holidays caused him to distance himself from the other children at school. He said:

I got along with the other kids at school, yet there were times when issues, such as the Flag, Christmas, and birth day parties, that it was like I alienated myself. That was based on what I was taught, that those things are of Pagan origin, and it was not acceptable to do anything of that nature as a Jehovah's Witness. I thought these things were wrong. Not that anyone at school gave me a hard time, just that I alienated myself. It was sort of self-imposed.

Although children may not be baptized as members of the Congregation they can often be found participating in the *field service*. Liz remarks about *field service* and *street witnessing*

Well, you know . . . there were problems and embarrassing moments as a child, with my friends. I can remember standing on the street corner as a little girl with the Watchtower and Awake magazines. I got embarrassed if I saw any of my friends coming, and really, I would try to hide, duck around the corner, so they wouldn't see me. It was humiliating, but I also felt humiliated for feeling that way, that I shouldn't feel that way, but I did. The Flag saluting in school, and there was peer pressures. I juggled what I did around my friends. Like I would fake saluting the Flag so as not to draw attention to myself.

Parents would take protective measures to limit their children's contact with non-Jehovah's Witnesses. Miles explained how the religion affected his education.

I was kept out of kindergarten by my parents, because they considered it bad association. To get into the first grade I had to take a reading test to see if I had missed the skills needed. Don't really recall anything else that was different or worth talking about.

Treanna remembers both good and bad about her childhood experience.

There are good and bad aspects of it. The good was, it was a very warm family. We live in the city close to the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, and our house was a host home for Bethel, and people from other countries would come stay there. The bad part is I missed things as a child, the holidays, not many school friends. I could not go to school events and kids stopped asking me to after a while. If there was an event I couldn't attend held at school I had to go to the library and wait it out. And some of my teachers were not all that understanding about it.

Racine added the additional social stressor of conflict between parent and partner.

The whole experience? My experience? You mean, what was it like? (pause) I'm having trouble thinking. That was miserable. Not that I wasn't loved, my mother was very loving; she divorced my step-father, that was due to the religion. I said loving, but it was loving with a "spare the rod" way about it. I didn't get spanked, I got "beat." Now she said she did the best she could. I don't have resentment though. Yet as a child I couldn't do anything the other kids did; no birth-days; no holidays, no Christmas; and there was no school activities, I couldn't do anything after school like the other kids, no sports; I wanted to be a cheerleader, couldn't do that.

Wendy did not have pleasant memories of being a child in Jehovah's Witnesses.

When asked what was it like, she said:

Terrible, horrible. I was isolated from the world, when in it I felt like an alien. I was humiliated as a child at school by the other kids for the style of clothes I wore. If there was an event on stage I was forced to take a stand against the flag. Horrible.

For the most part, Stacy sums the social experience of Jehovah Witness children for those fortunate enough to live within a city's limits.

The only way I can put it is, my father was very controlling. I intended to please him. I wasn't socially deprived, I had association with lot's of Jehovah's Witnesses. We lived in the city, and the Witnesses made a tight group, so I don't feel I was alone much.

Official Membership in the Organization

Though a child may be born or raised into the religion membership in the Organization is not official until one becomes baptized. There are 15 direct responses to Question 3 *When did you first become a Jehovah's Witness* (see Table 4).

Children however, are taught from an early age to adopt all the activities of a member in good standing with Jehovah's Witnesses. Marlene began her *witnessing* behaviors very early.

I was baptized at 13, but I really became [a member] at 4 years old by going to meetings and door-to-door. We had a little speech to present and as we got older we were expected to say more. By the time I was 8 I was giving talks in the Theocratic Ministry School, and by 10 I was writing my own parts.

Pablo also began to participate in the meetings at the same age.

Being raised in it I felt it was my belief, my religion, so I didn't question it as a child. I got baptized at 14, Jan 19, 1985. I was active in the religion from an early age, and I began to give discourses at about 7 or 8 years old.

Liz began her preaching skills nearly 6 years before getting baptized.

I was baptized at about 15 or 16 years old. I was really a Witness from as long as I can remember though; I started going door-to-door at 10.

TABLE 4.

Age Became a Member (Baptized) <i>n</i> = 15		
<i>Age At Time of Baptism</i>	#	%
6-10	1	6.66
11-14	10	66.67
15-19	2	13.33
20-25	1	6.66
26-28	1	6.66

Locus of Control

The interview with the participants included a question regarding what prompted them to get baptized. In most traditional Christian religions infant baptism is not a willful choice, it is one decided upon by the parents of the child; the child's locus of control is *external* in that it originates with another. With Jehovah's Witnesses, the step of baptism requires that the individual has an understanding of what he or she is doing; the assumption is that the individual's locus of control is *internal*. Thus, the age varies as to when one will take such a step. There are however, in this study, nuances within the responses of the 15 participants who answered Question 5, *What prompted your decision [to get baptized]?* indicating what influenced the decision to get baptized; the respondents gave some of the reasons that led them to do such a thing as total immersion in water as a symbol of their dedication to God.

Question 5 is intended to identify if the respondent was motivated by an *internal* or *external* locus of control. A common theme between the respondents is that they did not feel they made a choice independently of their respective families or the Congregation; 5 of the respondents felt that they did not *willfully* make a decision.

Racine: To join? Get baptized? There was no decision; I didn't have a choice. I was forced to be one, I never had a choice, it was just the thing you were expected to do. My mother had a choice, I didn't, those are her words. She told me how hard it must be for me not knowing anything else, like being born into it, I was 5.

Pablo: It was not a personal decision, it was accepted as the right thing to do, although I do remember pressure from my mother, and the pressure was in the form of using someone else raised in the Truth who is baptized at 19. It was implied that something was wrong with that; something is wrong with someone who waits that long to get baptized. I would then hear from my mother, "How long are 'you' going to wait?" Ok, I started to get that this was expected of me, one night I called an elder and told him that I wished to be baptized.

Didi: It was pressure from the Congregation, they were the only people that you interfaced with. We were to have no regard for family, relatives, that weren't Witnesses. We were not taught to go on much into the outside world, such as to get an education, go to college.

Miranda: There was no decision. My parents said to me that this was the time, and that was what I was gonna do. It was that way with everything else in life as well, my parents took the lead and I followed. The decision to get baptized was also based on my desire to serve God.

Marlene also stated that what prompted her was parental pressure that getting baptized "was the right thing to do." She adds though, that she did not want to just please people, she wanted to please God, which implies that getting baptized would please God.

Treanna internalized a portion of her decision, yet felt pressure from her parents as well. She adds the element of the nature of the belief system of a Jehovah's Witness. She draws from the concept of a *resurrection*, yet this points to a time in the future after Armageddon, when the only survivors will be members of the Organization. She said she wanted to be there to welcome a relative back from the dead.

At that time in my life I did feel spiritual, and I wanted to do the right thing. I was sincere, but I felt it was expected of me. I felt pressure from my parents, 'cause people my age were baptized. I felt I had to keep up with that. Another

thing, my aunt had died of cancer, and it was so sad and horrible when she died. She died before I got baptized, and baptism was an assurance to see my aunt in the resurrection. Baptism made me a part of everything; it meant to be a Jehovah's Witness.

Treanna began to respond with an *internal* locus of control, yet it is the *external* pressure from parents, and the comparison with others her age that caused her to take the step. Also, there is the stimuli of receiving a reward, such as the *hope* of the resurrection of the dead to an earthly life, and being present at that time *if* one becomes a Jehovah's Witness by getting baptized.

Prior to Wendy's baptism her brother got baptized as a Jehovah's Witness; he subsequently committed suicide. She was given two distinctly different responses to the death of her brother; the first response excused certain Witnesses from attending his funeral.

I got baptized in 1974; I was 14 years old. My brother became a witness and committed suicide. One of the worst things that they told me is that he wouldn't be in the new world, and there was no real memorial service for him. It is considered the unforgivable sin. That was before I got baptized. Then they told me to get baptized and then I would have a chance to see my brother again. An elder told me that, "through the nature of my brother's death we will not attend the service." He had just died. I couldn't believe they said that.

The second response was used as an enticement for her to get baptized.

The chance to be in the New World. It was made very clear if I don't, get baptized, I would not be in the New World; I wouldn't have a chance to see my brother.

Thus, Wendy states that the doctrinal issue of the resurrection had an influence upon her decision to get baptized. The stimuli of a reward sets the locus of control as externalized; the nature of the reward in Wendy's case is based solely on the level of her conviction in the religion.

Being born and raised a Jehovah's Witness did not keep Eric on the prescribed course of development. His answer to Question 3 (When did you first become a Jehovah's Witness?), and Question 5 (What prompted your decision?)

I was born in 1957, and was raised into it. I left at about the age of 18 or 19, and then went back . . . I was forced into getting baptized, and was pressured by the Witness that studied with me when I was 28. I was put into a sort of mental duress, and emotional blackmail. That's when I got baptized, and that same year the elders put me on "involuntary disassociation" because they considered me a threat to others. They pressured me to take a stand for Jehovah's organization at that time. The Watchtower plays on an individual personally by using scriptures to get you to do what you "need" to do. And they relate these scriptures to Jehovah God.

Miles felt parental pressure as he got closer to an acceptable age, 13 and a half. His response to his parents however, was based on the fact that they had been adults when they started studying with Jehovah's Witnesses while he was an infant. He said, "There was pressure from my parents. My only response to them was that they waited."

Liz looked up to a role model who was a Jehovah Witness.

I had been going to meetings regularly, and I knew from the teachings it was time to make a dedication to God. What prompted it was a prominent lady in the Congregation who was a Pioneer. She took an interest in me. In my mind I thought I was sincere, yet I was really impressed by her friendship, and the prestige she got.

Stevie had partially internalized the will to perform the act, yet there was a modicum of peer pressure as well.

It was like an inevitable thing on the horizon. I considered it a "when" and not an "if." What stimulated me was not wanting to be left behind by my peers.

Of the 15 responses to the question only 1, Robert, expressed an *internal* locus of control. He stated that getting baptized and becoming a Jehovah Witness gave him a sense of belonging, which he said he never had before. Treanna, Liz, and Stevie

exhibited both an *internal* and an *external* locus of control. The remaining 11 all felt that they did not really make a decision in the matter; these ones got baptized into the Organization as the result of parental pressure, pressure from the Congregation, or the sense that getting baptized was *expected* of them.

Depth of Participation and Subsequent Reasons to Exit

After reviewing the results of the participant's membership in the Organization, and their subsequent exit it would be timely to contrast and compare their responses to questions 7 *What activities did you participate in when you were in the Organization?*, 8 *What was that experience like for you?*, and Question 9, *What influenced your decision to leave?*

Of the 16 respondents 8 (50.00%) considered themselves *very active*; of these 8 there were 5 who had been a *pioneer* at some time as a Witness; 2 were *Bethelites* for more than a year; and 1 was a *ministerial servant* who also gave hour long *public talks*. There are 3 (18.75%) that were *active*, and 5 (31.25%) were *moderately active* (see Table 5).

TABLE 5.

Levels of Activity as One of Jehovah's Witnesses <i>N</i> = 16		
<i>Level of Activity</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Very Active	8	50.00
Active	3	18.75
Moderately Active	5	31.25

Structured Activity

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses perform a number of activities that serve as a demonstration of their individual level of commitment to the Organization. Those activities such as preparing, participating, and attending all five meetings a week; each meeting is held for a minimum of one hour. Members also participate in *field service* by going *door-to-door* preaching their message. Some who volunteer to devote extra time to preaching commit to becoming *pioneers*, who are considered fulltime preachers, though the hours necessary to do this work amount to between 50-100 or more a month. There is no educational requirement to perform this activity, and one only need be a baptized member of the Congregation.

Other activities include; conducting a *Bible study* with persons of interest; *street witnessing*; *incidental witnessing*; *public speaking*; serving as an *elder* or *ministerial servant*; *Bethel Service*; or *missionary work*. The respondents were asked what activities he or she participated in while a member of the Organization.

The Meetings

The meetings are called; the *Book Study*; the *Theocratic Ministry School*; *Your Service Meeting*; the *Public Talk* and the *Watchtower Study*. The meetings are regularly scheduled to be held three days a week. One evening is spent at the *Book Study*, usually in the home of a member who has been approved by the Congregation elders. Those who meet for the *Book Study* are a small group, which is composed of about 10-12 people, most of which are baptized Witnesses, yet non-Witnesses that have an interest in becoming Jehovah's Witnesses may attend. The purpose is to read and study a selected publication of the WTB&TS.

Another meeting night is scheduled to include both the *Theocratic Ministry School* and the *Service Meeting* held at the Kingdom Hall, which the entire Congregation is required to attend. On Sunday there is the *Public Talk*, also at the Kingdom Hall, and this meeting is considered to be open to the general public. This presentation is a 50 minute discourse on a Biblical theme; the content is prepared from an outline written and designed by the Organization.

Directly after the *Public Talk* is the *Watchtower Study*. The Organization designates an article from the *Watchtower* journal to be studied every week. This is a very formal audience participation meeting. The facilitator is called the *Watchtower Study Conductor*, who is most often an elder, and he is assisted by the *Watchtower Reader*, who is either an elder or a ministerial servant. The *Watchtower study* is a question and answer session focused on the questions and answers designated by the Organization; each paragraph in the article is numbered, and a corresponding numbered question is printed in the footer below each column. The Congregation participates by raising their hands to be called upon to answer a question; personal questions are discouraged from being asked by the members of the Congregation during the *Watchtower study*.

What it was Like to be Active

Responses for what motivated such participation reveal what that experience was like. Racine expressed that meeting attendance *Watchtower study* was an intimidating experience.

Of course you had to study beforehand . . . and be prepared to comment . . . it was automatic, no choice, and preparing consumed your time, you had no time for anything else. If you didn't comment it meant you didn't study, and you

didn't want people looking down on you making you feel small or sick. If you were spiritually sick people would think that there is something wrong with you.

Attending this meeting implied that one was prepared to answer the questions, according to Jamie, "I only answered at the meetings because it was expected of you."

To be considered an *active* Jehovah's Witness one has to attend all the meetings, participate in the *field service*, and conduct *Bible studies* with interested people.

Though the work is voluntary there is little if any room for options as Didi said:

There's not any choice; it's all or nothing. I was groomed to be a Pioneer. I attended the Theocratic Ministry School meeting, gave talks; service three or four times a week; Bible Studies in the community. I was an Active Witness, not because my heart was in it, because I hated it. I did it because I had to.

Racine also stated that *field service* was a chore, though being a *pioneer* had its rewards.

I went from door-to-door, cause I had to, but Auxiliary Pioneering was more goal oriented, like I was on a mission. So many hours to put in; counting the books you placed; calling on people; it was like interesting, being on a mission, and it gave me the approval of the Congregation.

Part of her activity was to conduct *Bible studies* with her friends from school so that she could have friends that weren't Jehovah's Witnesses, which is a rather clever way to get around the Organizational restriction of not associating with non-Jehovah Witnesses.

As she puts it, "I was only supposed to play with kids from the Congregation, no one else, unless you had a Bible Study with them, so I did that. Doing all that was my whole life."

Being *active* carried with it a certain sense of obligation to meet the standards that were explicitly expressed to all that would be members in good standing. Wendy explained that, "They would tell us that we had to preach the Word, and let others decide if it would be rejected." Betty felt it was an extremely negative experience to have to preach that "Word,"

I thought the world would end in 1975; they told us there was no time left. That was in 1972, using the metaphor of an alarm clock about to go off. I was scared; it's scary to have to tell someone that the world is going to come to an end. Even with Bible Studies, they are taught that in order to survive Armageddon they have to change, and if you don't change enough you won't make it. It was frightening at times . . . it was frightening.

For Marlene who said, "I hated the field service," though there were other issues that colored her experience as very negative. She added,

The toughest part was being a second class citizen, women are treated that way. Women aren't allowed to have any privileges of service, like being Ministerial Servants, only the men are allowed to do that. I did research and studied extra which caused me to ask questions. I once went to a Servant with a question, and he told me to go ask my husband.

Preparing for the *field service* centered around preparation from and for the *Theocratic Ministry School* meeting and the *Service Meeting*. In these two meetings skills are acquired that Jehovah's Witnesses use to promote the Society's literature, learn public speaking, and focus on overcoming some of the objections raised by some of the people that are met in the door-to-door work. Parts in the program are assigned to both the men and the women of the Congregation, that must be prepared and practiced for the night of the meeting. Those scheduled to present a part do so from the speaker's podium in front of the Congregation. The male members are allowed to

present their part facing directly toward the Congregation; a woman is not permitted to present directly facing the Congregation, but must be seated while giving her part facing another person as they engage in a conversational vignette.

Wendy felt that she had gotten a good deal from her experience in the *Theocratic Ministry School*. She told the researcher:

Well, I am thankful for the Theocratic Ministry School; it gave me great sales training. I'm in sales now, so it really has helped a lot. Some of it I enjoyed doing--

Stacey explained some of the activities she participated in, and the purpose of the *Theocratic Ministry School*. Stacey explained:

I . . . would go door-to-door, in my teens I vacation pioneered during the summer and holidays. They set goals for hours to preach every day. In the Congregation [I] gave parts in the Kingdom Ministry School. That is to train you to go door-to-door. We were taught how to break through the resistance from people who would say, "I'm not interested."

All of the participants in this study attended the meetings, and were *active* even if only moderately. Racine, who was *active* in all aspects said, "It was overwhelming." Carol was *active*, and said she did, "Everything that was required of a Witness. Door-to-door, pray, meetings, study, indoctrination of my children, Assemblies . . ." Carol did not just jump in and out of the Jehovah's Witness experience at will; it became her whole life to her. "I did everything I could to the point that it was my only world, and my children only associated with other Witness children." Marlene also said that, "No matter what you did right it was never good enough." This same theme came through in Robert's responses as he began to feel that he was being forced to do things. His

view is, "What it was that a person was doing was never good enough, whatever you did." For Wendy there was also a feeling of inadequacy that followed her, as she recalled, "I couldn't handle not being good enough."

Eric would be considered moderately active. He would go door-to-door, and give talks at the Kingdom Hall, yet he did not have any desire to be a ministerial servant. This can be problematic for a male member as they are encouraged to grow in their commitment to the Organization by taking on more responsibility. For Eric it created a conflict between reaching out to perform more duty oriented tasks as a Jehovah's Witness, and making a living to be able to provide for his family. He related this to the researcher in an apologetic and pleading tone when he said, "I had a business, and a family to support, and the organization was consuming too much of my time. There was also a conflict with my wife at the time, as she was a non-believing mate."

Reasons for Exiting

Eric began to do some research, and came to realize, as he says, "what the Organization said was a bunch of lies. I thought, if I have the truth, I wondered why do I have to lie to people?" His conflicts grew, and when confronted by the elders of his Congregation, when he had decided to exit they would not acknowledge what he had researched in the books written by the founders of the Organization. In Eric's own words, "The elders only wanted to know if I was loyal to the Watchtower Society. They said if I repeated, what I had been telling them, to anybody else they would consider me an opposer to the Watchtower." He began to develop the trait of critical thinking.

Other respondents also showed the characteristic of critical thinking. Learning to think independently of the Organization came to Betty after she started college as she says, "I also learned about critical thinking, and before that I let them do the thinking for me." Betty took a psychology course, and she remembers "An elder's wife said because I studied psychology I was learning doctrines of demons."

Racine started questioning, "What is wrong with having a birthday?" Then she questioned the belief that celebrating holidays wrong. She said, "Later on I started to question a lot. I decided I didn't want my daughter to be raised like me . . . We celebrate everything. I think how could God condemn me to death for doing that?"

Robert did a good deal of reading, and found inconsistencies in the teachings of the Watchtower. This caused him to have questions, which he brought to the leaders that he knew. He said, "The elders in the Congregation would tell me, 'You should know the answers by now; you shouldn't be asking questions like that.'"

Pablo also did research on doctrinal inconsistencies and the early history of the Watchtower Society. He found that, "They make excuses for things that didn't happen, like Armageddon didn't come in 1975." These things influenced his decision to leave the Organization. Further research that Pablo did drew heavy comparisons with other groups, as he puts it

And the research I did on other groups that are known as cults, such as the Moonies; Jim Jones, People's Temple; the Heaven's Gate; the Restoration for the 10 Commandments of God; I saw as a pattern for the Witnesses, and all these other groups. I saw the elements of a control group being prevalent in the Watch Tower Society.

Marlene has a vivid recollection of what the Organization thought about critical thinking, or even taking the time to think. She recalls:

The one experience I had was when a visiting Circuit Overseer came to the Congregation and made the comment that the washing machine was the worst invention ever made, because it gave the sisters too much time to think. I was the only one that had to walk out and get some fresh air.

Stacey felt it was hypocrisy that influenced her. Stacey's father, an elder at the time, refused to see her disfellowshipped brother when he was dying of cancer. She asked her dad to go see him, and his response was, "Isn't it better he die of cancer than by God's judgment?" Her father refused to attend the funeral for her brother because the service was conducted by a Lutheran minister.

Didi said she was brutalized by the elders when she took an overdose of sleeping pills due to the grief and depression she experienced at the death of her 6 year old adopted son. She was summoned to a Judicial Committee, and she said, "One of the brothers of the Committee, I think he was a janitor by job, said that was a horrible thing I did, and if I did it again I would be disfellowshipped."

Miranda saw, as she says, "Things from the local elders that sowed a lack of love." Then as she began to study the Bible with her husband and another Witness friend she said that they began to find out the Watchtower was wrong. Treanna took a Logic and Semantics class in college and used the Watchtower articles to argue that the line of reasoning it contained was not valid. Liz could not accept that the Watchtower brought out that organ transplants were likened to cannibalism. Steve had doubts that

became intense over time, which became increasingly difficult to suppress. Carol had doubts from right after her baptism up until she left the Organization 24 years afterward. It was the doubt that influenced Carol's decision to leave, as she says

Doubts. At the library I did a search on "Jehovah's Witnesses," and found a book, "40 years a Watchtower slave." I got scared that the organization wasn't the truth, terrified. Like a paradox I went back, and then left after the information I found changed what I believed.

Duration of Time In and Out of the Organization

Length of Time In

The duration of the participant's membership in the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society ranges from 8 to over 40 years (see Table 6).

TABLE 6.

How Long In Jehovah's Witnesses <i>N</i> = 16		
<i>Number of Years In Organization</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
8-11	2	12.50
12-15	-	-
16-19	5	31.25
20-23	5	31.25
24-27	1	6.25
28 over	3	18.75

The participant with the longest duration of time as a member is also the second eldest of the respondents, Liz. She responded to the question, "How long were you in the Organization?"

Until about a year ago, but I was disfellowshipped for about a year much much earlier, and came back. I have totally quit going, though I haven't written a letter of disassociation or been disfellowshipped. 46 years.

Length of Time Out

“How long has it been since you left?” was also asked of the participants (see Table 7). There are 2 (12.50%) participants whose exit from the Organization is between 1 and 3 years before this study, and 1 (6.25%) participant’s exit is 24 years ago. The largest cohort has 6 (37.50%) constituents whose exit is between 4-7 years before this study. There is 1 (6.25%) participant each for 8-11, 20-23, and 24-27 years since their exit; 3 (18.75%) whose exit was 12-15, 2 (12.50%) who left 16-19, and 1 (6.25%) who has been out of the Organization 20 years before this study.

TABLE 7.

How Long Out of Jehovah’s Witnesses <i>N</i> = 16		
<i>Number of Years Since Exiting</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
1-3	2	12.50
4-7	6	37.50
8-11	1	6.25
12-15	3	18.75
16-19	2	12.5
20-23	1	6.25
24-27	1	6.25

For the purposes of comparing individual participant’s duration of time *in* and *out* of Jehovah’s Witnesses Table 8 is included. There is no correlation between time and experience in the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, and duration of time since each individual’s exit. Table 8 is provided to give an overview of each member’s as the remainder of the results to the interview are presented here.

TABLE 8.

Duration of Time In and Out of Organization <i>N</i> = 16		
<i>Former Jehovah's Witness</i>	<i>Years in Organization</i>	<i>Years out of Organization</i>
Pablo	16	1
Liz	46	1
Jamie	19	4
Stevie	21	4
Treanna	20	5
Miles	11	6
Robert	17	6
Carol	24	6
Eric	22	11
Stacey	44	12
Racine	16	13
Marlene	22	13
Wendy	23	17
Miranda	45	17
Betty	8	20
Didi	16	24

Attitudes and Perceptions of the Governing Body and the Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses

It is generally accepted among Jehovah's Witnesses that there is only one source of information regarding doctrinal issues within their belief system; that source is the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. The members of the Governing Body decide what will eventually be printed in the literature of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and this is done based on the premise that they are directly inspired by God to do so. Their decisions are not to be challenged or questioned by the rank and file members. The Governing Body are also the ones that decide if there are to be any changes in the stance of the Organization. Changes are disseminated as "new light," which is also expected to be accepted by members in good standing.

To disobey the Governing Body has serious ramifications, and the 14. *Did/do you feel fear for not obeying the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses?* and 15. *Did/do you feel that not obeying them will result in "God's wrath?"* The respondents replied in the following section.

Fear of the Governing Body

The question was asked, *Did/do you feel fear for not obeying the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses?* There is a mixed response between those who did *fear* the *Governing Body* and those who did not. Those that did fear them had a similar perception. Wendy struck on the severity of not following their direction.

Of course, you have to do what they tell you, they are Jehovah's mouth piece. If you didn't you'll be killed at Armageddon.

There is also a feeling that a hierarchy separates the *Governing Body* from the members at large, as Robert said:

I thought they were above all the lower organization Witnesses, that they had a direct line to God. After time I felt that they didn't . . .

. . . and Jamie felt the power of a hierarchy as well.

I was always taught to be in awe of them, that they are superior to average Witnesses. They are shut-up in a secret room in Brooklyn, making decisions that effect millions of people, like they have a direct line to God. They have the power to make decisions.

Even after exiting Carol carried a sense of paranoia that there was an accounting of her actions that would follow her. When asked if she felt *fear* she said:

Absolutely, definitely. They believe that is the connection to God, very scared. The first time I started celebrating the holidays I thought, someone is coming to get me, as if I was always being watched.

Didi had the same sense that Wendy did that stemmed on the theme of Armageddon, though she adds an amusing anecdote.

Absolutely. As a Witness I did . . . the year 1975 had people worked-up into a frenzy, where they did not even get their teeth fixed, and when Armageddon didn't come, you had holes in your teeth.

For those who responded that they did not *fear* the *Governing Body* they quantified that fear. Miles' activity in the Organization was moderate, and his *exit* came from the resolve to no longer be a member.

I think that the ingrained fear of being destroyed by God runs pretty deep, and it has stayed with me a long time. And I wasn't taking to heart what I was taught, but I knew the individual I wanted to be was not what they wanted me to be.

Fear for the *Governing Body* did not subside for Eric until he got deeper into his research. His statement reflects the theme that a member does not question those in power in the Organization.

Before I started doing the research I did feel fear. It was fear that I was going against God's wishes. Then, as the research developed the fear subsided. You are not allowed to question, or read anything that speaks out against the organization. They even stated in the Watchtower magazine, that it is a bad thing to have independent thinking. I had fear that Satan was influencing my mind.

The *Governing Body* establishes policy about doctrinal issues. One of the issues that some of the members of the organization have a problem with is that of blood transfusions. The logic and reason that these leaders has caused a debate on the validity of the restriction. It was on just this issue that Pablo felt dispelled his *fear* of the *Governing Body*.

I would have to say no. My first research was the stance of blood. I went to the Bible, and looked at the context of the scriptures applied to the Governing Body as the "faithful and discreet slave," and after that I began to see that they are a group of men that have taken themselves far too seriously.

Although Pablo is in the early stage of *exit* he has done personal work to strengthen himself. He has educated himself about the way that the *Governing Body* uses its power.

Some of the respondents who answered *no* to the question qualified the response with a reference to having fear for the *Governing Body* as an active member, and how that fear changed upon *exiting*. Miranda is one who included an episode of conflict right after the time she had *exited*. She and her husband took the Organization to court, yet there was no resolution that was not resolved.

No, I did not fear them at all when I got out. I did when I was in the Jehovah's Witnesses, but not after. We had a law suit in 1984 to sue the Watchtower, because they had defamed our name, separated us from friends and family. Our lawyer said they have unlimited funds, and that their tactic was to continually appeal any judgments against them, and we could not afford to continue to challenge them. That's the way the Watchtower handles all the law suits, they appeal, stall, and delay which raises the legal costs, and most people, most everybody, can't financially compete with that. We couldn't, so, we had to get out of it. They, the Watchtower, have total control; they can do anything they want.

When a member is brought to a Judicial Committee of Jehovah's Witnesses, the member is expected to honor the arrangement as being directed by God. Treanna was brought up on issues that the elders wanted to question her. She gives her response to them as part of her answer to the interview question. Did she *fear* the *Governing Body* of Jehovah's Witnesses?

No. I had no respect for them when I left. In fact, I think the real question that got me disfellowshipped was when I was brought in to a committee meeting to question me. They asked me, "Do you recognize the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, and this group of Elders here as the people chosen by Jehovah to conduct this interview, and to have this meeting with you?" I said, "Hell no." I think that kind of says it.

Stevie feels that he has a unique relationship with God, and that he has not been left alone or abandoned to make a decision for himself. Yet, there was a time when that was not so, as he says:

I knew that God out ranks them. If God said to “go,” they can’t touch me. But I was still nervous to say anything against them. It took 4 years to be able to say anything to anybody that was contradictory to the Society.

Racine denied fearing the *Governing Body*, yet she put importance on the rules of behavior. She equated her perception of obedience to the Organization with obedience to God, and that to disobey meant death. She said:

Not the Governing Body, just the rules; I was breaking the rules. God is gonna kill me, he hates me, a fear of God, or the understanding that the Society told me about God.

And Stacey struggled with confusion when answering the question. She did not want to believe that she feared them, but as she continued the *fear* came to the surface.

No. I guess you do in a sense. That could be based on fear, nor really knowing if I do. It was like you lived in constant fear, underlying fear of God’s wrath. The Governing Body handed down the rules you never thought about them. I feared the elders, the local Congregation. They got the rules from the Governing Body.

Her response carried over that fear to include a *fear of God’s wrath* the subject of the next question, *Did/do you feel that not obeying them will result in “God’s wrath?”*

Fearing the Wrath of God

Those who answered *no* to both of these questions were Betty, Miranda, and Treanna. Both of Betty’s responses were given without a hesitation, and her answer regarding *God’s wrath*, “No, I felt that God loved me,” expressed a confidence in her choice to *exit*.

With those that answered yes there was a direct connection to disobeying the *Governing Body* with the result being *God's wrath*, though they did not express doubt of their *exit*. Miranda said, "Yes, I believed they were the go between for God, Jesus and the organization." It took time for her to conquer that, as she continued, "[I] felt that for quite a while, maybe 3 or 4 years, until I got into psychotherapy, which was a no-no. They consider psychotherapy to be for people that didn't have enough faith."

The cause of the *fear* came from Jamie.

Yes, that is what you are taught. To reject the organization you reject God. If you don't do what they tell you to do you are directly defying Jehovah, because they are His direct communication to us . . .

. . . Didi said:

I was really fearful of that, it took me years to work through that. It was like an insurance policy, having the favor of the Governing Body, and being in the organization. I was taught it was a way of buying into God's good graces, and the "Ark," and unless you maintained good status, as a Witness, your children would die. So it is guilt, and fear. It is how they control people . . .

. . . Eric:

At the time when I was still believing it was God's organization I did. And yes, that I would be punished and destroyed at the battle of Armageddon if I left . . .

. . . Miles:

Yes. That God would punish me, and destroy me . . .

. . . and Carol who said, "I thought I would be killed at Armageddon, or die then and there at any moment." Wendy also felt that way.

Absolutely, God is going to destroy me if I don't do what they say. They are the Faithful and Discreet Slave.

That *fear* has its roots in the Organization's standards of conduct, and the observance of the teachings. Racine saw *God's wrath* as the direct consequence, "for not obeying the rules, and after leaving it stays with you . . . the rules . . . you just can't shake it off." Her connection between the *Governing Body* and *God's wrath* is based on the concept of rules.

Not the Governing Body, just the rules; I was breaking the rules. God is gonna kill me, he hates me, a fear of God, or the understanding that the Society told me about God.

Stevie added:

Up to the point I got a sign, before that, sure. Any infringement could have led to God's wrath. Even not combing my hair as a Witness caused anxiety. That's why I got panic attacks.

There were comments that indicated with the passing of time one overcomes the *fear* of the Organization and of *God's wrath*. This can be read in the responses above, and also in what Pablo said, "While I was a fully believing Witness I did. Not now," and by what Robert said:

At the time I did, I didn't realize they wee a man made organization; I thought they were divine. I feel there are a lot of nice people, but they are trapped. Then I began to feel it was a very good circus act. I never thought I was disobeying anything they just didn't answer my questions. I couldn't stand that, they demanded that I believe anything, whatever they said.

The Impact of Exiting

Whether a respondent was born into the Organization, or came into it later, all admit that Jehovah's Witnesses composed the entire framework of their social experience. The aspects of the person in environment explored the effects of *exiting* Jehovah's Witnesses by asking the question; 10. *How has that choice [to exit] affected your life?* 12. *Did/do you experience a sense of loss?* 11. *What effects did that decision*

have on you [emotionally]? and 23. What has exiting done to your personal relationships, work, friends, or family? Examining these responses will begin to reveal the ramifications of *exiting* Jehovah's Witnesses for these participants.

Effects of Loss

The consensus among the participants is the experience of a sense of loss, although the interpretation of loss varies within the sample. The three dominant themes of loss are *loss of family*, *loss of friends* and *loss of a belief system*, all of which impact an individual's sense of community. When asked *did you experience a sense of loss*, Carol responded, "Absolutely. My whole social world completely gone in one instant. I lost everything, husband, house, right down to my cat." This portrays a dramatic impact on the person by the alteration of environment.

Having the lost the community in which Treanna was raised literally threw her into chaos. She was 20 years old at the time and going to college, yet still living at home. She related how tumultuous her life immediately became.

I came from a model family in a small Congregation. It pretty much devastated my family. When I was disfellowshipped, my father told me to leave home. I had to stop school, work full-time, find a place to live, and I gained 30 pounds. I lost my parents. I lost a normal mother and daughter relationship, that I can share my life with. I can't share my life with them, they respond, "That's nice, but it doesn't matter." My sister hasn't spoken to me. Lost friends, and I lost that sense of community I had with my Greek culture.

In the 5 years since Treanna has been out of the Organization she has made strides in regaining control of herself and her life, although she has not regained her family nor their support. She explained to the researcher that she acquired the ability to make better decisions, which she attributes to a process similar to what a child goes through.

She says:

Now I don't feel that the world is as scary as I was told it was going to be. I was told if I left I would fall into drugs, get pregnant, and that's not the case. I recently saw a girlfriend of mine who is a Witness, and she said, "Wow, you look different than what I expected to see." She thought I would be mean, old and harsh, and I'm not. She was surprised. That made me happy.

She also added that she misses her family, "not the religion."

Marlene was in the Organization for 22 years, and has been out for 13, yet she can still recall what it was like to first *exit*.

I call what I went through the Armageddon Attitude, that at any minute I was going to die. It made it a tough time setting goals, nothing exists long term; the end is right around the corner.

She also lost her family when she left the religion, yet she has managed to reunite with one of her daughters.

I have a son who is a Bethelite in Guam. He won't talk to me. My mother doesn't talk to me. I left the religion and my husband, I was going to get rid of all of it. Family won't talk to me, unless they have to. Family--I don't have relationships. My oldest daughter is out now, so we talk all the time, it's the only relationship I have. I don't have a lot of friends. In work I have friends. When I left I lost all my friends, because bad association spoils useful habits is what they say, they isolate you. Leaving was hard because I wasn't prepared for it.

Racine experienced a change of personality, and her relationships impacted by her *exit* have also evolved. She said:

Well, I got divorced. Leaving changed me. He wanted a naïve and insecure person, and he didn't like that I changed. I was growing up and he didn't want me to. I lost contact with all the friends I had. My x-sister-in-law contacted me. She's not a witness anymore. It was like catching-up on who is still in and who is out. All my family that was involved has quit; 6 cousins; 6 adult aunts and uncles. One aunt died a witness, and one is still in but only in word, not actively in.

Miranda was a Jehovah's Witness 45 years, and even after being out for 17 she still has loss.

In the sense that we had a loss from family and friends, not from the teachings, there's no loss there, the loss is of family and friends. We no longer had contact with them.

After 17 years her family will still not talk to her.

One's friendships play an import role in a community system; loss is felt all the more so when that network of friends is extensive, as in the case of Didi.

Incredible loss. We had been very social in the Congregation. We had a Witness wedding where 700 people, all Witnesses, attended. And since I chose not to continue with the Society, I lost all my friends.

Eric lost friends and after that it proved who his real friends were.

I lost some good friends, yet they were not really friends. I wanted to express myself to them, but I could not. I found out that people I had confided in went back and told the Elders about it. A true friend is someone you can share doubts, and feelings with, who accepts you for who you are. The ones that I was warned about, such as former Jehovah's Witnesses, turned out to be real friends.

Jamie had a similar experience.

When you spend your whole life doing something and when you leave you have nothing to replace it with. Lost my friends, but these are not true friends, because they never showed they cared; we left and nobody called. They were not friends. It took about 6 months for me to realize that and start to make real friends.

The loss of one's personal belief system has also been expressed by some of the participants. This, in essence, attacks one's sense of community and belonging, which when extricated leaves one very much alone, as Racine responded:

A huge sense. After the jubilation . . . and a sense of freedom, and even now I still feel a loss. I think you feel the sense of community, the organization first, and then the religious part. When it's all gone everything is gone . . .

... Stacey:

Spiritually, yes. I always studied the Bible. We studied the articles in the Watchtower, I did extra research, I prepared, but I didn't question what it said. All I know is that I was led down a path, and I missed that association, to be able to speak on a spiritual level ...

... Stevie:

Yes, because everything I believed was up in the air. I wasn't one that goes for the ride, I was a true believer, and it was tumultuous and unsettling ...

... Pablo:

Yes. There has been an immense sense of loss. The belief system all my life has been completely stripped away. You no longer feel you are a special privileged person in the sight of God. That's difficult to deal with, and for those who were good friends, for them the loyalty to the Watch Tower is more important than friendship with you. As far as religions go, they feel they have a special relationship with God. I've lost the idealism, and I cannot confide in them any more ...

... Liz:

It was depressing at first. It feels empty and lonely that you give-up something you've believed all your life, and I feel disillusioned. There's positive and negative. There is like something missing from your life, and it's like you can hardly get rid of it.

These are the responses that address the issue of loss in regard to *family, friends*, and a *belief system*.

Didi mentioned that the first 5 years after *exiting* were the worst. There was no familiarity with the world outside, and not knowing anyone who had left the Organization she found herself in uncharted territory. She did manage to develop another support system though.

I had no connections. I was free floating. My husband and I left at the same time, and more fortunate enough to have built our home in a beautiful spot around a lake. The local neighbors, who were not Witnesses, became our family.

Didi recently had contact with her sister, which was an eye-opening experience.

My sister invited me to her son's wedding. I haven't see her very often over the past 20 years, and through her I got to meet some of my friends from back then. There was an occasion when we met at a local restaurant for dinner. I was appalled by their inability to converse, because of their truly limited social skills. It was like I was talking to children, and they were middle-aged adults.

Another incident from Didi's *exit* happened 24 years ago; she had been in the *Truth* for 16 years.

Initially, I was just consumed with if I had rationally made the right decision. I literally snuck into a Christian book store, no, it was a thrift store, and picked up a Bible that was not a Watchtower Bible. I took it home and read from Matthew to Revelation. Then it gave me a whole different story from what I had before. I became angry, very angry.

Wendy mentioned her brother's suicide earlier, and responded to a question about loss with the memory of that on her mind. She expressed herself with very strong language.

Of course, of course. My brother wouldn't have died in that stupid cult. I worry about who is gonna die.

Effects of Shunning

Anger was expressed over the issue of *shunning*, a practice that has members in good standing turn their backs to those who leave; to be *shunned* is to be cut off from any association with members in good standing, even if family. Seven respondents made reference to being shunned or not being talked to by friends and family. Feelings of anger and hostility are also addressed in Question 30. *Did/do you harbor any anger*

or hostility [towards Organization, other members, or family]? and 31. Did/do you feel hostility toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses?, which impact the person in environment.

Betty's anger rose from being *shunned*, as she says, "I was angry for being shunned. Hurt, that the people closest to me turned their backs on me." She related an experience with a family member

My parents, aunts, cousins, my brother shunned me, they all turned their backs on me. That bothered me a lot, when my brother wouldn't speak to me besides yes or no. There was no conversation, especially about my choice to leave. They are not allowed to talk about it or they get disfellowshipped. I needed help one time, and so I called my aunt to come give me a ride. She did, but when I tried to talk to her she wouldn't answer me.

At the end of that ride Betty got the reason why her Aunt would not answer her. She said, "When my aunt dropped me off she turned to me and said, 'I don't want you to call me again, because I don't want to speak to you.'" When she was asked if she *harbored any anger or hostility* she said, "Not to individuals who are still members."

Thus, the act of *shunning* is the thrust behind the refusal for family members or friends to have any contact with the one who *exits*, as it is with Miranda

The only regret is that my son and his family, and my sister and her family are still Witnesses and we have no contact with them. And all my friends won't talk to us because of being disfellowshipped; they will not speak to us.

Stacey also said that her life was affected adversely

We live in a small town with only one grocery store 15 Kilometers away. We would go and if seen by a Witness they would shun me, and it really bothered me. It was only through counseling that I realized the problem was not mine, it was theirs . . .

. . . Pablo, who is still in the process of *exiting*, and at the time of this study is working through issues with his wife. He explained how *shunning* is implemented.

Initially there has been quite a bit of stress. My wife is a very devote Witness. During this interview she walked by and shot me a couple of “looks.” Growing up as a Witness you are discouraged to form relationships with anyone who is not a Witness, and I am very concerned that our relationship remain intact. If you are kicked out other Witnesses will not acknowledge you, and you will get a complete shunning, unless they “have” to talk to you. If you attend a meeting you are considered a “bad associate,” and you cannot speak to anyone when you are there. I am working with her so she does not have to go through that, and our relationship is getting closer than before.

One might think that such treatment would make Pablo angry, though his response to having *anger or hostility* is:

I don’t have hostility, or anything towards the people. I actually feel more sorry for them than anger. The impression I get is that the leaders are just as much prisoners as the rank and file. If they want to leave, or stop it they couldn’t. Some feel that a great change is needed, yet they can’t speak out openly for it. If anyone steps out of line they are “gone,” because they, the Society, feel they need to keep it pure. No, not hostility, I feel bad for them.

Like Pablo, Stevie’s marriage went through a similar transition when his wife continued as a Jehovah’s Witness after he *exited*. Their relationship has progressed to another stage.

Initially, it was very difficult. My wife was still a witness. I was very cautious not to do or say anything so as not to offend her. Gradually, she began to change her mind about the Organization when she saw that the Congregation treated our children like lepers, because of my decision. My kids weren’t allowed to play with the other Witness kids. We are both now in active recovery for a year and a half. At this point in time, I’m very happy, much happier. Mainly, I don’t have to repress or manipulate my mind to find ways to make the leaders right.

It has taken Stevie and his wife 4 years to reach this stage of development; Stevie was in the Organization for 21 years. Does he have any *anger or hostility*? His answer is:

Definitely, toward the Organization. They took away half of my life! Very angry about this, and screwed me up so bad it’s going to take the rest of my life

to get over it. I'm angry about shunning that puts a pregnant teenager out on the street for having sex. I'm angry of having been told that, "God speaks through us," and there is no evidence that is so, and yet that is what the Governing Body claims.

The power of *shunning*, in its ability to split a family apart, is demonstrated by the experience of Miranda. Her son is a Jehovah's Witness. He had moved to another state and Miranda and her husband would go visit, and she explains how they were treated.

We would go there, but he wouldn't allow us to come to his house. We stayed at a nearby motel, and would meet him in a restaurant, and sit at separate tables, close enough to hear each other, but he wouldn't sit with us at the same table. He did this so that he would not be accused of sitting and eating with those who had been disfellowshipped, which if he had done and been found out would have gotten him disfellowshipped.

Though her son came to Miranda's 50th wedding anniversary, because it was held at a community center and not a church, he did draw the line based on another issue.

But when my husband became a pastor in the Foursquare International Church, and my son found out and wrote back that, because, "Dad has become a clergyman of Babylon the Great, we don't feel we can associate with you any longer." That was in 1999 . . . two years we haven't seen or talked to him. My sister kind of the same stand, with my son, to back him up, but she at least talks to me on the phone. We don't talk about spiritual matters, only everyday things, but not in public, she won't be seen with us in public, but she will talk to me on the phone.

One might conclude that any *anger or hostility* held toward the Organization would be merely the grumbling of the disgruntled. It is not the purpose of this study to prove or disprove that. What the participants did is give their emotional response to a closed-ended question about *anger or hostility*; 7 of those participants said yes at varying degrees to having *anger or hostility* toward the Organization.

The nature of the *anger or hostility* felt by the respondents is not particularly the result of a personal disagreement or mistreatment, rather it stems from a global perspective apart from the individuals. When Miranda was asked if she had any *anger or hostility* she said:

No, I think they are just as blinded as I was. I was angry at the organization, that they had lied, but I don't harbor hostility, and I have forgiven them for what they have done in my life. It has helped me to be who I am today, being a Witness.

Anger was also felt by those who had reckonings over the validity of the religion as well. Wendy struggled with suicidal ideation for 8 years until she came to grips with a very salient realization.

I was going through suicidal tendency myself. Not anymore. I felt very betrayed, angry, relieved its not the true religion, and anger was with me for a very long time.

Does Wendy still *harbor anger or hostility*?

Very much. I remember once then, saw them coming to my door. I ran to the door and just as they got to it I slammed the door as hard as I could. Early on I had an extreme amount of anger. I still have anger toward the Governing Body, how they ruin lives. They know what they do up there.

Marlene drew a distinction between the Organization and the members. She responded:

Sure I do . . . toward the organization though, not the rank and file. I feel that they are just as duped as I was. It's not their fault; I don't blame them. I feel that they believe they are doing the right thing. Most of all we're not allowed to be angry, to feel anger, or to show it in any way. To do that . . . it's loosing self-control. Got to be in control, ya know. That's the way it is.

Robert drew the same distinction, yet has a problem with one of his relatives. He answered:

Yes a lot. Mostly for the organization and those responsible for running it, not the members; particularly angry and hate for the Governing Body, they know better. And not my immediate family, except my cousin, I have animosity toward him. At one time I almost threw a brick through the front window of his house.

Stacey observed an ironic almost paradoxical turn of events.

Lots, lots, towards the elders, 'cause they sit in the site of judgment, they quote scriptures, but there is no understanding of the problem itself. Three of those elders that made decisions to disfellowship people are now disfellowshipped themselves. It makes you wonder.

Didi had a pragmatic view of the Organization and an assessment of how those who leave are treated.

For a long time I was extremely hostile. I view the organization as a business, and it is in the business to keep itself in business, not for the people, for its self. It's working on a self perpetuating formula that came from the past, so why should it change. The organization puts up a barrier to maintain its status quo by manipulating a fear for everybody on the outside, especially those who have left.

Jamie had a similar feeling about the business aspects of the Organization, but not a disturbing level of *anger or hostility* over it.

Not towards the organization. Some anger that they are using people for financial gain, and manipulate people. As far as my parents no, they made the best decisions they could, like us all, I'm still struggling with them, I'm not a child, I am in control of my own actions. I got out and they have gotten more entrenched.

Treanna's response was from a personal impact perspective, yet she recoiled from the question regarding *anger or hostility*.

Yeah. I blame the organization for making my family unhappy. Anger is a little harsh, it's more like disappointment, disgust, I'm annoyed by their ignorance. And I was very offended by the Elders prying into my personal life at the committee meeting with me. Yes. I feel that my family abandon me.

Liz answered *yes* initially, though she recants in the same line. She also states that she does not have any *anger* toward her family members who are Jehovah's Witnesses, due to a conflict about caring for her elderly grandmother which resulted in a lack of contact among the family.

Yes, towards the Organization, and maybe towards one Elder, but not really. I think the Internet has helped that. As for my family, since that happened with my

Grandmother we never communicated too much, and it, the family, has been all split-up over that. I don't have lasting anger or animosity toward them, but there's no connection anymore.

Carol took responsibility for her feelings.

Yes, very much so. Anger towards the organization and anger towards my self.

Miles admitted to feelings of *anger* which did not last.

I had some hostility towards the organization until the beginning of last year, the new millennium. Then I decided to let it go. I haven't had any trouble since then.

Two respondents did not have an issue with anger, Eric and Racine. Racine said she felt "sad" rather than angry. Eric found himself in a situation that tested his ability to cope with being misrepresented, and still did not feel anger. He even found it surprising that others thought he had hatred for Jehovah's Witnesses when that simply was not so.

No. When I left, I didn't have any anxiety or hostility toward the organization. I only tried to defend myself against those who attacked me with false accusations, that I was immoral, and doing bad things, when I only asked questions, questioned the Society, and gave information to people that asked me for it. Some time after that Witnesses would come by and ask me why I hated them so much. I would tell them that they had gotten the wrong information. I didn't hate them.

The Psychological Implications of Exiting Jehovah's Witnesses

To explore the possibilities of psychological factors of *fear*, *failure*, and *guilt*,

Question 40. *Have you ever felt "fearful" about exiting?* 13. *Did/do you feel any sense of failure?* and 26. *Did/do you ever feel 'guilt' for your decision [to exit]?* were asked.

The respondents had a peculiar linkage between three factors, and there is some crossover between factors.

Effect of Fear

Fear wreaked havoc and upheaval for all of the respondents at one time in their lives or at the time of *exit*. *Exit* however, brings to bear certain conditions that the individual members did not have to deal with up to that point. There were 7 respondents that did not feel *fear* upon *exiting*, and 9 that did. Those that did feel *fear* gave their reasons.

Wendy said that she had experienced *fear*, that she was unable to cope, and that she was anxious about it. Marlene was in *fear* of being homeless, which was connected to the loss of a social support system.

Yes, truly afraid. I had no one to help me . . . all on my own . . . no friends . . . no family. Because if I failed I'd have to go back and grovel. When I thought of going back, I thought it would have to be on my terms, not theirs. I couldn't do that not . . . to be able to play it off as a role. It would have been an act that I would have to hide. I didn't do that . . . I was scared. I had a fear of being homeless, even though I could always maintain a job, but I had lost the structure of my life. I needed to replace the lack of spirituality, but no idea what. I felt as if lost and wandering . . .

Robert battled with mental health factors.

Yeah. I dissociated and felt the exit would be the end that lead to eternal damnation and oblivion. My family wanted to put me in the hospital, they wanted to hospitalize me, but I wouldn't go. Then they gave me Stelazine and Navane . . . After exiting I was afraid to bump into a Witness, it made me panicky, and very upset. It threw me into a mood . . .

Carol's *fear* was about the decision to make an *exit*.

Yes, fearful that maybe I shouldn't be doing this, that I should stop all this nonsense, and quit trying to exit. When I see a car of Witnesses going out in the field service, I feel glad I'm not. What a joke; what a waste.

Fear continued as a common theme between participants that was motivated by a variety of internal realizations and external pressures. Pablo used an interesting metaphor to answer if he felt *fear* in *exiting*.

Yes, at first I was fearful. Like being in a roller coaster, and then riding along and seeing a break in the track up ahead, and wanting to climb out of the car in a panic, yet everybody else is having such a good time and enjoying the ride. I see that things in the Society need to be changed, but I can't do anything

Miranda's *fear* precipitated her eventual *exit*, and she learned to cope in order to overcome her *fear*.

Before I left, exiting was one of my biggest fears. Before I left I had a dream one night that I was disfellowshipped, and I woke-up crying. But when I actually left I was not fearful. I had developed a support system of others who had similar interests, and I continued to study what troubled me so about the Watchtower. I put my trust in God, and the fear of leaving became gratitude for getting out.

Treanna felt the social impact of *fear*, and did not feel it was related to the religion. She said, "Yeah, I didn't know what was going to happen to me. It wasn't about the religion aspect, it was more again the family aspect." Thrown into survival she conquered her *fear*:

What I missed was my family, not the religion. Gradually, I made better moral decisions, I questioned myself based on what I was taught or what I felt. Setting my own standards was like a process. I felt like a child discovering things for the first time. Now I don't feel that the world is as scary as I was told it was going to be. I was told if I left I would fall into drugs, get pregnant, and that's not the case. I recently saw a girlfriend of mine who is a Witness, and she said, "Wow, you look different that what I expected to see." She thought I would be mean, old and harsh, and I'm not. She was surprised. That made me happy.

It took Treanna close to 5 years after *exiting* to be able to say that.

Stevie's fear was attached to the loss of a primal tenet of the religion, that Jehovah's Witnesses will survive cataclysm of apocalyptic proportion.

Oh yeah, that's what held me back all that time. It's not just fear of loosing here and now, it's fear of loosing life in paradise forever, or being disloyal to God, fear of that. Fear of dieing at Armageddon.

Liz however, is still in fear and unable to cope as she said, "Yes, in the past. Yeah, I am unable to cope with it, and I do feel anxious at times."

Those that responded *no* were fairly succinct in their answers. Betty and Eric did not elaborate at all. Jamie felt that she benefited from her *exit* saying, "Those anxious feelings were alleviated when I stopped going." Stacey stated, "No. It built up over time, and when I left, I left." And when Miles was ready to walk out of the Organization he did so without hesitation as he says, "At the time, definitely not. I typed the letter, posted and walked out."

At the time of the interview Didi did not have an issue with fear; she has been out the longest of the respondents, 24 years. She explained:

No. I only felt extremely grateful for the decision. It took a while, for I had to loose everything about that life in order to gain myself. I can read a book without guilt, Steven King is my favorite author; the Witnesses I know think he's the devil incarnate or some kind of demon . . . and every thinking ability about being a Witness is filled with guilt.

Effect of Failure

The responses to feeling a *sense of failure* were evenly split between the sample with 8 respondents answering yes, and 8 respondents no. Those who said yes, in most all cases, followed with an explanation or a degree of severity. Marlene felt that she could not live up to what was expected of her, and that the Organization's expectations are interpreted as God's expectations.

Yes, while in and after I left. You can't do good enough, even though they would say we are imperfect creatures, you had to strive for perfection. You have the feeling you have to be godlike . . . live up to God's expectations. Miss one meeting and they wonder where you are.

Feelings of failure to God was an issue to Racine, rather than failure to the Organization. She said, "No, I didn't . . . not to the religion, but failure to God. I still don't pray, so I feel I let God down. It took about a year to hit me, I was self-involved."

Carol's feeling of failure lead to self-doubt that she still has:

Absolutely, as a human, as a person. I felt I was so far behind anyone my age. It was a very intense feeling of failure. I doubted myself, and would always second guess and question myself a lot.

Stacey was born into the Organization, dated a man who had studied with Witnesses expressly so that they could get married. She raised her children as Jehovah's Witnesses, which is the source of her feelings of failure.

As a mother. I had restricted my children in such a manner, and I denied them things in life.

Having doubts about aspects of the religion is a common theme between participants that arose during their interviews. These doubts stem from various things, such as the complex teachings, the social restrictions, recanting of teachings, and prophesy about the end of the world not happening. Robert felt failure was the result of his doubt.

Yeah, I guess I did in a way. I felt all my life I was going to do something great, but by the time I left I knew I wouldn't. Loss came when I left, and I left because of my doubts. They harp about that, doubt is some kind of sin. I have sleep paralysis, have had it all my life, which they had a problem with. They said I was demon possessed.

The 8 who said *no* to having a *sense of failure* did so with aplomb and certainty. Betty, who had the shortest duration of time in the Organization (8 years), presented herself as self-assertive and self-confident in her choice to *exit*. When asked the question she responded without hesitation that she did not feel *failure*, as she put it, “Not then or now.” Her answer is a self-assured expression of how she felt.

It is also evident that Pablo is very sure of himself about not feeling *failure*; his response turns *failure* back over to the Organization. “Personally, I do not. I haven’t failed in any way. Instead of failure it is more a sense of betrayal of universal proportion.” Miranda is just as at ease, “No. I didn’t feel a sense of failure even after being in it for over 40 years; I felt that I was led out.” And Didi did not recall any *failure*, as she responded:

No, I felt a sense of joy that I was able to escape while I was young so I could make a life. I lost my family, and they haven’t been in our house in 20 years. When my oldest son was killed in a motorcycle accident, they didn’t even come to the funeral.

Mile’s had total resolve at the time of his *exit*, and did not feel any *sense of failure*, as he said, “I didn’t feel a sense of failure even after being in it for over 40 years.”

Effect of Guilt

When asked if they felt *guilt* for *exiting* 7, Miranda, Pablo, Didi, Eric Miles, Treanna, and Stevie flatly said *no*. Instead of *guilt* Treanna feels regret, “I never wanted to hurt my family,” she said. Miranda supports her feelings with her spiritual path.

No, not to leave, never. I feel it was God himself that had led us out. We had done nothing wrong. Some who leave for other reasons, such as immorality, or breaking rules may have, but we didn’t do anything wrong, we just felt it was not God’s organization, and we didn’t have guilt for leaving it.

The Pablo and Didi, who did not feel *guilt*, said so without embellishment. Eric said *no* and added, “At the time I left? No guilt.” Miles responded, “when my mother died all the guilt feelings left. When it came to what I did in regards to the organization she was very influential.”

At this point *fear*, *failure* and *guilt* conflate, converge and concatenate at different stages of *exiting*, which can contribute to very scattered and disorganized patterns of thinking.

Parents played a role in how 2 of the respondent felt in the area of *failure* or *guilt*. Treanna externalized the source of any *failure* and she will not own it.

No, that’s not a word I would . . . no. My parents think I failed them, but I don’t agree with that.

She comes from a Greek enclave where her father was a Congregational Overseer; theirs was a model family to the local Jehovah’s Witnesses; her *exiting* severely impacted her relationship with her mother ripping them apart; she was put out of the home; and her life took a dramatic turn towards survival. In the early stages of *exit* she felt *fear* and *guilt*:

When I first left I was scared. My family put me out; I had no where to stay. I had nightmares of Armageddon, and a recurring nightmare of my father rapidly wasting away before my eyes and blaming me for it . . . [Fear?] Yeah, I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. It wasn’t about the religion aspect, it was more again the family aspect.

Jamie however, at first felt she failed her parents expectations, though her decision to leave did not threaten an already trouble childhood experience with poor communication with her parents. Her activity in the Organization was perfunctory, and although her *exit* was gradual she still had to deal with *fear* and *guilt* regarding her parents. She said of her *exit*:

Though it was positive there was guilt. My parents were not pleased. They would call others to contact me to go to meetings. Then there was fear that bad things will happen to you. Everything bad comes from the Devil, and all the good things come from Jehovah. Not that all that good happened to me, but to blame everything on the Devil didn't make sense.

Her response to *failure* is similar to Treanna's in that their parent's felt their daughters had failed them. After being out of the Organization 4 years she has taken an existential perspective towards what her parents are feeling. Does she have a *sense of failure*? In her words:

No, not really. I felt like I had failed my parents expectations for me, because you are raised to please your parents, and you don't want to do things that make them unhappy. It was enough struggling that I was growing with a child, and I came to feel that their happiness is not my responsibility. Failure to my parents. Now, I'm angry about it. I have several issues. When growing up at the dinner table I would what to talk about my day but my parents are not communicating with me because we sat at the table and ate . . . no talk. I'm too much of a thinking person and I like to talk about that, and my parents never talked.

Earlier Jamie had said that *guilt* and *fear* were like a bonding agent that kept one in the Organization, yet she now implies that she felt *guilt* about leaving, by prefacing that she didn't mean it was a *wrong* decision. She explains:

Never that is was a wrong decision. I knew I couldn't be a hypocrite. In order to be in the organization you have to be there do it, act out, where a mask. I couldn't do that, my conscious would not allow me to convince others, preach, to be part of something that made my life so miserable.

Her explanation reveals that she felt *guilt* by denying her feelings, and acting out a role that was not true to her nature.

When asked about *failure* Stevie said he dealt with *guilt* and expressed that his path lead him to develop a unique relationship with God, as he says, "I felt shame for quite a while, but not failure. Because I got a sign from God to leave I didn't feel failure. When asked about *guilt* he said:

No, not for a minute. It wasn't my decision, God told me to do it, that's why I did it. I held off making a commitment about leaving, and then I saw a sign. I didn't have to take responsibility for the decision. Not that I found an easy cop-out, I was shocked, when I got the answer, not like I was making a way out for me . . . the easy way.

Carol, on the other hand, is quite explicit on the nature of her *guilt*.

Absolutely, 100 per cent, yup. Absolutely grinding guilt. Guilt about leaving, and guilt that I made the wrong decision. Even to this day I swear to God, I wonder if there's gonna be an Armageddon, and if I'm gonna be killed. There's still this thing that's inside of me that I want to get out.

There were feeling from Liz that *exiting* was a wrong decision.

Liz Yeah, I think so. I have had guilt about leaving, and that I may have made the wrong decision . . . [in a very low tone] yeah. Intellectually, it's the right thing to do, but emotionally it feels like the wrong thing.

Liz is working through first year issues of *exiting*, and Marlene remembers the early part of her *exit*.

For the first two years, when I thought it was the truth . . . guilt 'cause of my children. I left them with their father, and I was afraid to get too close because their mother was going to die, but no guilt about leaving.

When Marlene left the Organization she went out as someone going off to face death.

In order to spare her children the pain of such a loss she distanced herself from them by leaving them with their father who remained in the Truth.

Wendy felt *guilt* in the early stages of *exiting*.

At first when I didn't go to meetings I did. I felt awful, a lot of guilt. The decision to leave led to other decisions, like to educate myself, and learn more to help someone else. I have guilt now.

After 17 years she still feels *guilt* about leaving the Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Perceptions of Self and Purpose in Life

Respondents were also asked perceptions of self, *sense of worth*, *self-esteem*, and the effects of *exiting* on their *sense of purpose in life* in Question 24; The open-ended nature of Question 24 gave the respondents a great deal of latitude. *How has your decision to exit Jehovah's Witnesses effected how you feel about yourself [sense of worth; self-esteem]? Question 25, Has exiting effected your sense of purpose in life, and Question 27, Did/do you ever have thoughts that being a member wasn't all that bad,* are intended to collect overall feelings in the experience of being a Jehovah's Witness and then *exiting*.

Perceptions of Self-esteem

Racine, Marlene, Robert, and Liz were dealing with low *self-esteem* in the present, each using some reference to the past. Their responses reflected that one's *self-esteem* was denigrated due to not meeting the expectations of the religion, and that having their *sense of self* continually assailed left them with little if any fortitude to go back to the religion once one *exited*. It was felt, by one of the respondents, that being intimidated in such a way wore him down.

Liz is still in the early stages of *exit*. She hesitated before responding to the question, and then focused first on the act of *exiting* itself, and her feelings of *failure*.

“In one way it makes you feel a failure, but in another way it’s helped to depart, and I don’t feel like a hypocrite.” Her assessment of where she is now is, “But, mostly I have less self-worth because it’s a feeling of failure.”

Wendy is further along the continuum of *exiting* than Jamie, though each has a firm grasp on their *self-esteem*. They can both look back on the experience in the Organization with a healthy sense of their personal development, though they recall how their *self-esteem* was assailed by years of being a member. Jamie, who has been out of the Organization 4 years said she has made progress in building her self-esteem.

Oh, much better, it always bothered me. I think they work hard to strip self-esteem, no matter what you do, you could go out door-to-door and put in 10 hours, they tell you, “why not 12? You place 10 magazines, “why not 15?” Put in 30 hours, “why not 60?” No matter what you do its not good enough. When you listen to that three times a week it is pretty bad.

Wendy saw her decision to *exit* as the means to freedom of choice:

I feel now I have more control in my life, that I can use my mind, as if I was made an intelligent person. I don’t worry about God striking my dead. Exiting it helped me to get free from that. I had very low self-esteem in and when I came out.

The respondents characterized *exiting* as more than a single act of separation; *exiting* is a process that unfolds over time. To shed light on that Didi compared where *self-esteem* is now, 24 years later, from where it was in the early stage of *exit*:

I feel so good; my self-esteem is good. I am so grateful. On the first five-year period I was a basket case, I was in uncharted territory. They are taught to fear the helping professions, the medical professions, and the psychology professions, psychiatrists, that they are misguided, and give you bad advice, and that they are the arm of Satan, and that has been hammered into people.

Pablo, in his first year of ‘deciding’ to *exit* is already beginning to get in touch with some sort of process, as he says:

I struggled with a sense of low self-esteem. It took me about 2 weeks to go through various stage related to anger and bitterness. The low self-esteem was in the past. At this point, If I can do this I can do anything.

He is dealing with *exiting* issues early and with the support of those who have done so before him, whereas some of the others took years to work through it. Steve, felt his self-esteem has been affected by *exiting* in a positive way, "It took me 2 years to get control of my life to get rid of the shame. Now I have a happy positive outlook, and a lot of good stuff." And both Eric and Miles see themselves better off and their individual self-esteem as improved "over time."

For Carol there is a sense of fortitude not previously realized, and there is also a sense of pride in her *self-esteem* and in her choice to *exit*.

That I have the strength that I never knew existed. I'm proud that I left. I know that there are women that want to leave, but they are afraid. My sense of worth goes up and comes down, because I'm so behind; then I have low self-esteem.

Success was bad, careers were frowned upon. Everyone was a janitor, the Witness men, and the women clean houses. That's not a career. The Society doesn't want you to succeed, they want you to be low, they don't want you to get wealthy.

Though she admitted to bouts with low *self-esteem*, she no longer lives with external restrictions, and is cognizant of where she is and the possibilities to work towards future goals.

Miranda was also confident about her *self-esteem* and credits her *exit* in building it.

Actually, I think it has effected my self-esteem, because I can now give myself to God, and I have good self-esteem because of that. As a Jehovah's Witness you are not good enough, and that wears down your self-esteem. Like I was not doing

enough, and the guilt I had about going door-to-door, and getting sick over it, 'cause I was not happy doing it. I felt, what's wrong with me, why can't I be happy doing this?

Miranda feels satisfied with her choice of a spiritual path, one based on her high level of *self-esteem*.

Yeah, it has, now my purpose is to please God, not to please man. I have no fear about what people think about me.

Table 9 displays the self-reporting level of *self-esteem* responses at the time of *exit* and the improved sense of *self-esteem* over time.

TABLE 9.

The Effect of Exiting on Self-worth and Self-esteem <i>N</i> = 16		
<i>Effect of Exiting on Self-Esteem</i>	#	%
Low Self-Esteem (at Exit)	14	87.50
High Self-Esteem (at Exit)	2	12.50
Improved Self-Esteem (over time)	9	56.25

Perceptions of Purpose in Life

Racine, Marlene, Robert, and Liz also disclosed a marked uncertainty about their *purpose in life* at the present. Marlene reflected on life as a Jehovah's Witness being purposely directed to "spread the Kingdom word, and help others survive Armageddon," though she admitted that is not her purpose now. She said, "I'm still not sure what my purpose in life is." Liz stated that her *purpose in life* had been effected by exiting, which also was effect by depression. Racine shows a thematic response adding, "Now its take a day at a time . . . focus on secular not spiritual . . . purpose has changed drastically. I've become the person they warned you about," and Robert said he now

opts for a more mysterious view toward life and purpose, where as he used to define his purpose as something predictable.

For Jamie and Wendy of them *exiting* transformed their *purpose in life* as well in a positive way. Jamie voiced her feelings in a confident and pleased manner:

Yes, I actually feel my life has meaning now, whereas before a piece of dirt. Life is good.

She is confident about her *meaning* and *purpose*, and quite pleased with life. Wendy also expressed that she has a spiritual path, and a sure place as a person in life:

Yeah. I feel God has a personal plan for me in my life, not like in a crowd of robots, as an individual.

Purpose of life issues are at times connected to career goals for respondents such as Pablo.

It definitely has. I no longer have the purpose of saving the world. My purpose is a little more realistic, I just want to save everybody I "know." [laughs] I would like to go to college and become a counselor. I like working with people; it gives me a good feeling. I can talk to people, and they tell me that it is easy for them to talk me. So, I work well with people.

Here again a shift from the preaching activity of the life of a Witness, as Eric did.

It's made my purpose in life more worthwhile. While you're in the Watchtower, your purpose is to gain converts, and to tell them that the end is coming.

Stevie isn't sure yet about his *purpose in life*, and cannot equate his life as *purpose* without idealistic attributes.

Sure, sure. Purpose? Well, Yeah. My purpose used to be to emulate the life of God. [laughs] How grandiose. I don't have much of a purpose right now, other than to be a good husband, father, and interested in my family. Grandeur purpose? I don't have a great purpose, other than personally.

And after 6 years Miles cannot equate his life with any higher sense of purpose either.

Really, that's the one respect I have a ways to go. I feel a loss of time, that I've wasted a lot of time developing a purpose. My home life is ok, my job is ok, I just haven't come to any conclusion about long-term issues.

Carol still struggles with her *purpose in life* and how *exiting* has effected it.

Absolutely. I still don't know, and it's been 6 years. Then I knew for sure. It was to live in a paradise earth, serve God, live forever. I don't know what my purpose is now.

Both Didi and Miranda have had many years to grapple with *purpose*. Didi used the time to educate herself and learn a profession.

Yes, I have a purpose now, whereas I didn't feel that before. I helped a woman and her child one time. The mother was a schizophrenic, and an alcoholic, and her little girl has fetal alcohol syndrome. I became entwined with her case, and we have had 13 foster kids, and I couldn't have done that if I was a Witness. I wouldn't be able to be a nurse. I went to school, got an education and became a registered nurse. I wouldn't have known how to not impose my criteria on other people had I not gotten an education. I wouldn't have known how to let them be their own person.

Perceptions of Membership

When asked if they *ever had thoughts that being a member was not all that bad* Betty, Racine, Jamie, Stacey, Didi and Miles responded *no*. Betty "never ever thought of it"; Racine, "honestly never looked back. Regrets are not from leaving the organization. I felt bad that God didn't love me, I had nowhere to go, but not for the people or the organization"; Jamie said, "I really allow myself to think about I have a child, it was a miserable experience, and think long about what my child's life would be like. Didn't want him to go though that"; Stacey said she would not go back due to the reinstatement process, which she saw as deliberately humiliating; Miles rejected the idea of ever returning to the Organization.

Did I ever have thoughts of going back? No. Being Active was a full-time responsibility. I did what I had to do, which was always the minimum, and that was only after high school. Gradually I lost interest; I was never deep with it to begin with.

And Didi explained her view of the experience.

No, I felt it was awful, a burden that was too heavy to carry, but if you are feeling sad what will cure that is knocking on more doors. I couldn't do that anymore. It's the guilt and fear that kept me in it. I don't have that anymore,

For the remainder of the respondents Marlene, Wendy, Robert, Carol, Pablo, Miranda, Treanna, Eric, Liz and Stevie found a modicum of merit in being a member, and they delineated these. Eric recalled two things that were not bad about being a member, though he closed with the negative side of it.

Oh yeah. There were some things that were good about it. The training was good, learning how to public speak. My younger brother, at the age of 7, was giving 5 minute talks to over 100 people. The bad thing is that Jehovah is going to kill you if you question the organization.

Liz responded similarly:

Yeah, there were some good parts to it, and there were some protections back there. Maybe, being a Jehovah's Witness gave me strong convictions, and I felt I was a moral person. It wasn't all bad. I think generally it was an overall negative package, but there was positive moments.

Carol benefited from the community of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Yes. When I was in it was easy, and it had a sense of tribal community, support, friends, people. The other day my life long friend, I miss her so much, called me and wanted to talk to me. She got out and we talked about that.

Wendy considered going back at one time.

When I was a child I thought, it was perfect, I was favored and privileged, that I was in the one true religion. After I left, I was gonna go back, but I couldn't keep smoking, and when I asked for help they wouldn't study with me, and that was not good.

Marlene felt that there were aspects of being a Jehovah's Witness that tempered her, which she does not deny is still a part of who she is. The question cause Treanna to be conflicted and it is reflected in her response.

There were good things about it, though all of it was bad. However, overall there are some things that are not all that bad. I look at it as a harmless cult, but I don't want to be told what to think.

Memories of membership in the Organization are a mixture of good and bad for 7 of the participants. Pablo really set the tone for memories of good things when he said that good occurred, "Occasionally, but then I was in the Watch Tower, and since then I have stepped back into reality." The reality of *exiting* however, required a therapeutic approach according to Stevie, and while actively engaged in his own healing thoughts of it not being all bad occur.

Sure, been through recovery. We go over and over all that. I went through lots of thoughts about it, but I didn't want to go back. It wasn't all bad, and it wasn't all wrong. I have gone around and around with it. But when I was a Witness it was shit. From the day I got baptized I had doubts, and in spite of my best efforts to repress them, they grew and grew until I left.

Robert intellectualized both the good and the bad aspects of being a member for him.

At times in it was ok. Going to meetings, conventions. It gave me a sense of doing right, like you were accomplishing something. They make all the decisions, you don't. Their rule I've heard it likened to Stalin. And they give it to you to parrot the right words, yet the meaning is not there. I had questions and I was told to remove all doubts, and the more research I did the more doubts it created, and questions that they would not address. They deconstruct the meaning of religion, nationalities, patriotism, the trinity, and challenge the traditional and it leaves you with the realization that the Bible is just literature, and nothing great about it. If you go back far enough you discover that the Bible had magic in it; the organization took the magic out.

Miranda, eldest of the participants, remember pleasant experiences as a

Jehovah's Witness, the things she got to do and the places she got to see.

Oh yeah. I didn't mind being a Jehovah's Witness. I got to do things and go places I'm sure I would have never done because of being a Witness. We liked the friends, and the travel, I got to see New York City twice, and Conventions in other cities I would have never gone to either had it not been for that. Being one I never had resentment. We saw cities we never would have seen. I don't regret being a Jehovah's Witness, but when things started happening, when we had doubts, within one year we were out. And I thought that they used harsh language towards those who disagreed with the Watchtower, calling them apostates; dogs returning to their vomit; swine wallowing in mud; spiritual adulterers. That was sort of the beginning of the end for me. There was even talk of certain brothers in Bethel that were studying the Bible only. One Witness told me about that and said, "Imagine, they are studying the Bible without the Watchtower," and she was truly shocked. That made it sound that studying the Bible without the Watchtower was something dirty.

Treanna saw both good and bad in membership

There were good things about it, though all of it was bad. However, overall there are some things that are not all that bad. I look at it as a harmless cult, but I don't want to be told what to think.

The Social Implications of Exiting Jehovah's Witnesses

Social Isolation

All of the respondents voiced much about the social factors of being a Jehovah's Witness throughout the study. There were issues of social impact as a child growing-up as a Witness, such as not being allowed to participate in school activities. Celebrating holidays is considered a violation religious belief by the Organization, thus restrictions applied to social engagement as adults as well. Jehovah's Witnesses as a group are not socially deprived at all, rather they are socially restricted to only associate with their own kind. One's religious community is also a social support system. Questions 20. *Did/do you feel isolated from the world?* and 22. *Since leaving the organization can*

you freely socialize with others in the community? explored the possible effect of social isolation as a member or once the dependence upon the Organization had been terminated through *exiting*. The responses that follow impart the impact of *isolation*.

Two of the respondents answered *no* to the question, Betty and Racine; they each qualify their responses with finding a substitute support or social system. Betty kept in touch with certain family members, and she also developed a new social system. She said:

No. A small part of the family that did not become Witnesses they acted as a support system, a cushion. They kept me informed about what was going on with them and such. I also made friends that were not Jehovah's Witnesses, so to them it didn't matter.

Betty felt that she can freely socialize with people from the community at large.

Racine, while not commenting on developing a support system chose an alternative social system among a sub-culture of non-Witness members. Did she feel *isolated* from the world?

No, I felt part of it. I was out all the time. I became involved in everything I was told not to do . . . Christmas, fornication, drunk, and drugs. I smoked marijuana. I did things based on my own decisions.

Since she has been out of the Organization she said, "Yes. I have no guilt, not at all. A sense of freedom."

One of the respondents, Pablo, did not consider himself *isolated*, but rather in a quasi *isolation* from social engagement.

Right now, I feel a sense of Limbo; not with the Watch Tower Society, but not away completely either. If I do leave I will completely cut my self off. I see people, Witnesses, who are tired of all they must do. Their best response to, "how are you doing?" is, "hanging in there." My family, my parents or others, may need my help, and I must be able to talk to them. I can't do that if I totally leave, exit. I feel a responsibility to be available to them, so that I might be able to help them.

Now Pablo feels, "I can have my neighbors, or a workmate over to my house without feeling guilty. As a Witness, that's not acceptable. I can associate without feeling bad for cultivating relationships with people who are not Witnesses."

Carol recalled the time she was at a similar stage of *exiting* as Pablo, yet her feelings were more of *isolation*

Oh god yes. I wasn't in the Witnesses, but not in the world. Lost all my friends, absolutely no support at all. Not one Witness called to see me when my husband left, not one called to see how I was.

She was asked whether now she can *freely socialize with others in the community?*

Yes, absolutely, and I've learned to be non-judgmental, and associate with Catholic friends, talk to homeless people, black, white or others. I've learned and am learning to be non-judgmental even.

The remaining responses are varying degrees of affirmative agreement that one who *exits* is socially *isolated*.

Marlene maintained a sort of separateness from others she would meet in the world. She explains how that manifested as *isolation*.

I felt isolated from the world. When you're raised in the Society you don't learn good social skills . . . how to make friends, except in the Congregation. There's no one to talk to about doubts. When I first left I kept my Jehovah's Witness past a secret. I wouldn't tell anyone at all. I finally made 2 friends that I could talk to about it, they weren't Witnesses, I told them. I avoided groups of people, and I was labeled aloof, but I was afraid to talk. And as a woman I remembered how I was treated in the Congregation. If you talked from the platform you couldn't talk straight to at the Congregation, you had to be turned talking to another person on stage with you. It felt that you had nothing to say, even today.

Marlene, responded to being able to *freely socialize*, when she said, "Absolutely. I never felt free to be myself. I wasn't able to give my point of view, and it was difficult, hard, for people to get to know me."

Poor social skills and limited personal contact with others are repeated in the responses to the theme of *social isolation*; it was the same with Wendy when she *exited*. She said, "Absolutely, absolutely. Could not relate to anybody else." Yet, after being out for 17 years she feels she can *freely socialize with others in the community*

Now I do, yet I wouldn't when I was exiting. I didn't, couldn't just go to another church, because they are all of the Devil. No friends, and its hard for me to be close to people. Felt they will betray me. And trust, I still have a hard time giving trust.

Jamie disclosed some of the behaviors of Jehovah's Witnesses that indicate lack of social skills interfacing with the world.

Yes, definitely, because, although I maintained friends, that social structure was gone. At first, there's no one coming to see you, now what? They live in such an isolated world. They even work in an isolated world. To Witnesses one of the most popular occupations they do is office cleaning, and why, 'cause they go there at night when the place is closed. It's easier to not have to deal with the world when there's no one around, no conflicts, no confrontations, no time to invest in making friends. Takes time to build friends and associations . . .

When asked if she can socialize now she said:

Yes, took a little while to learn how, but now its normal and nature to socialize after this many years, but I had to learn how, it's definitely not a skill that is taught.

Two respondents had thematic responses to both questions. Treanna said, "Yes; I had no friends," to *isolation*, and Miles' response is the same, "I would say so, yes. There was a time, after disassociating myself, I could count my friends on two fingers. It was a hard start to get on my own." Their answers also equate that over the years they have been able to reconstruct a social system of friends, and that at present *isolation* isn't an issue to them.

Some of the respondents considered *isolation* from the memory of being a member. Didi, Stacey, Miranda and Eric recalled feeling *isolated* as Jehovah's

Witnesses

Didi: Absolutely. Not only isolated, but trained to be fearful of everyone out in the world, and you are put in a place where there is no where to go. You are not allowed to read anything critical to their views.

Stacey: Very, and they mean you to be that way, for that means you have God's approval. When it comes to isolation, and its done for a reason. When a cult has control over people then they have them where they want them. When a cult has members isolated the cult then has control, and they tell them that they are approved by God, because the other religions of the world are condemned by Him.

Miranda: As a Jehovah's Witness, yes. I felt . . . because they teach you should not have any part of the world--no friends, no school mates or neighbors as friends, and we did not associate socially with anyone.

Eric: Yeah, as far as school activities. I didn't feel totally isolated, and during holidays or social events I would some times stay home, just to avoid the embarrassment . . .

Eric felt that today, 11 years after *exiting*, he has no problem socializing with others in the community. However, Stevie exclaimed, "Oh man, isolated? God, my whole life has been isolated, yeah," and he still feels its an issue, as does Stacey when asked if she can freely associate with others in the community.

No. I mentioned this is a small area, and once a Jehovah's Witness always a Jehovah's Witness. There are three churches, and if you come and join a church then you are accepted. I got a lot of things in my head I would probably argue about, but I don't need that in my life right now. I don't need the approval any more.

On the other hand, for Didi the local community has proved to be a support system she feels warmly about:

Yes. If it wasn't for my neighbors I don't know what I would have done. They became a support system to me. I've had them in my home. We've shared years of growing together. I know their children and they have known mine. They have

helped me, and I them, go through years of development with each other's families. You can't really survive without that. I didn't share my Witness experience with all of them, never felt the need to. There are two that I have though, and they have been very supportive of me, and my family; they are completely without judgment. I think that says a lot.

Miranda responded with a humorous twist when asked about socializing freely with others in the community.

All except Jehovah's Witnesses [laughs]. No, I will even socialize with them really, but it would only be because they do not know we were Witnesses. It's been so long new ones don't know us, but soon enough they find out, from others who we are; we were considered notorious.

Robert is seriously troubled with physical and mental health conditions that he feels *isolate* him for reasons other than being a former member of Jehovah's Witnesses. He said the he feels, "Very vulnerable. Friendships bring obligation emotionally. My Dissociative disorder interferes with that." He also does not feel adaptable to community socializing and said, "I still sort of believe what they asked me to believe, so I couldn't just walk into another church, Buddhist temple, synagogue, for quite some time, at least 3 or 4 years."

Of all the respondents Liz had the least to say, and she did so in a low tone without emotion. As to *isolation*, she said "Yes, Totally," and if she could socialize in the community freely, "No. I'm still isolated."

Effect of Exiting on Activities of Daily Living

The subjects responded to 4 questions related to activities of daily living (ADL),
32. *How has exiting affected your sleep patterns?* 33. *Did you experience any loss of how to carry out simple tasks [personal hygiene, grooming]?* 34. *Did/do you have*

difficulty managing your time? 35. Has exiting affected your diet? and 29. Is it easy to make decisions?

The area of ADLs most severely impacted among the respondents is that of *sleep patterns*. The sample yielded 12 of the 16 having some sort of *sleep pattern* disturbance. Four of the respondents directly attributed the disturbance to the experience of being a Jehovah's Witness. Racine's daily structure and mode of living, prior to *exiting*, was based on her activities in the Organization.

Yes. Since I first left, my schedule changed, my life style changed. Not having all the meetings. I don't sleep well . . . 4 to 6 hours, and I used to get less. I was out partying all night coming in at 5 AM, then getting up for work at 7.

For Didi the disturbance is founded on the teachings.

It did in the beginning, but not anymore. I had a really bad time sleeping. Partly because you are taught to be hyper alert, always scanning the horizon for danger. Satan is controlling every thing. Everyone that is not a Witness is under Satan's control . . . everything. You have to be cautious.

This sense of hyper vigilance may lie behind Pablo's *sleep pattern* disturbance, though he did not elaborate when he said, "At night my mind thinks so quick that I can't fall right asleep, its delayed." Delayed *sleep* was reported by Jamie, though she connects it to other psychosocial stressors in her life. She said, "I think that leaving my bad marriage had more to do with it than leaving the religion. I went through insomnia, couldn't fall asleep. Once asleep not a problem."

Marlene has recurrent dreams about her past.

Yes, I slept more and with nightmares that were very unpleasant. That happened for years afterward. In fact, I just recently had a Jehovah's Witness dream . . . a couple of months ago.

Carol also has unpleasant dreams as recalls, “Yes, I have nightmares, always. I don’t sleep deep at all, and my mind goes over the past all the time in my dreams.”

Miranda self-assessed substance abuse as a member, said, “As a Jehovah’s Witness I was a near alcoholic, and that effected my sleep.” Wendy has a similar recollection, and replied, “I could never sleep; sleeplessness, and fear is why I drank. I was tormented.”

Treanna did not mention anywhere else in the interview any diagnosis of depression, and the first indication she gives of depression is in response to *sleep pattern* disturbance.

The first six months I was very depressed, and spent entire days, two at a time, in bed. And the nightmares, which I still have occasionally.

The others who reported *sleep pattern* disturbance were; Betty, who found it hard to sleep; Liz, who slept more; and Robert who attributed the disturbance to “sleep paralysis.”

The area of decision making ability had 10 respondents that answered that they could not make decisions easily. Some of the respondents did not readily answer this question, and needed to be led by the researcher with probing questions; can you, without hesitation, do not know what to do. Marlene did not answer until the last probing question was used, and then she said:

Yes, it’s very hard for me to make decisions. The hardest part was making a decision about having a career, ‘cause I have this fear of failure. If there’s any chance of failure, I won’t do it. Spend a lot of time weighing both sides, too much time weighing and not enough time doing. I grew through the failures. I would eventually try something and fail. At first I thought it was because I am a woman.

Women are treated like that . . . don't make decisions . . . that's your husband's job . . . he's the head . . . he knows what is best. I don't believe that now, but I still have a problem with decisions . . . its still with me.

The factor of gender was brought up by Racine.

No. Isn't that a gender thing? [laughs] I mean aren't women like that? I'm a terrible decision-maker, cause I always wonder if I'm doing the right thing, because of guilt . . . guilty conscious. I worry what other people think of me, I worry. I want to be liked and be happy.

Jamie however, felt to the contrary, though she said she could not make small decisions.

[pause] for major things, yes, small decisions, like where to go for dinner no. But big things, I can do that . . . to move, 60 miles away . . . got out of a really bad marriage. Or the decision of going back to school. I raise a 4 year old.

Carol answered the question by using her decision to do the interview for this study as an example. She was interviewed by phone, and faced a moment of indecision as the time for her interview drew close. When asked about *decision making* she replied to the interviewer:

No, very hard. I didn't know if I would do this interview, and today I thought, as it came time for you to call, I'd go out and purposely miss this phone call. You don't make decisions in the Society, you are told what to do and when to do it.

Others with issues related to *decision making* struggled to articulate thoughts, hesitated, or could not give a direct answer to the question, such as Miles, Stacey, and Stevie.

Miles: [pause] . . . um . . . I think . . . pretty much. Yes, I don't think it's a major problem.

Stacey: Mmm, based on what you've been taught, depends on your conscience. That would make your decision making based on what I feel is pleasing to God.

Stevie: [pause] [interviewer repeated question] [pause] That's a general one . . . mmm . . . ah . . . not easy to make big decisions . . . got to take time with them . . . in general.

And those who could answer admitted they had difficulty completing tasks, or procrastinated past important deadlines, as Robert did when it came to *decision making* or face unemployment. He said it was not easy to make *decisions*.

No, I don't do that well. A lot of hesitation. Like I'd be out of a job, or about to be out of work, and I would think to start looking but it would take me days, weeks, just to start looking, and then I would be out of a job . . .

. . . so too with Treanna:

No. I consider myself very indecisive. A lot of research goes behind me coming to a decision, and anything I do . . .

. . . and Liz, who said, "It's not easy . . . yeah, like . . . no . . . I can't. I still feel kind of a drift."

Regarding *time management* 9 participants said they had difficulty; Racine, Marlene, Wendy and Liz said that *distraction* was an issue. Marlene added:

Very distracted. Start things, and then put them off. It was more procrastination, but it wasn't just after I left. I did that before, during and after I left. I'm still not any good with managing my time.

Racine has an orientation problem with time.

Yes. I'm always distracted, and I loose sense of what time and day it is, and I'm very forgetful.

Liz is the same.

Yes, very much. I easily distracted, very much, and I have a problem with the time of day. I forget things a whole lot.

For Stevie it is an issue of structure missing from his day, which has added new dimension to his daily schedule.

Well, yes. I measured time by my schedule at the Kingdom Hall. Now that the structure is gone organizing time is another matter. Now I take time to do things, more family things, and more of it.

Treanna dismissed the question owning that it has always been difficult and not related to *exiting*. Robert said that he needed supervision of sorts, “left to myself I while away the time. I need someone to set it for me. I tend to free float,” while Carol is “learning time management, and Miranda considers that the issue is just being “a very busy person.”

The remaining questions in this cluster exploring *loss of how to carry out simple tasks*, and *exiting affected your diet*, Marlene and Stacey remarked about depression.

Marlene’s depression was so incapacitating she could not work.

Yes, in the very bad part of the depression. Then I couldn’t perform on the job, couldn’t handle my duties. I had to go on full disability then. After that I went on part disability, and then began to be able to work. I had to live.

Marlene said that during her depression she, “Lost my appetite at first, and still periodically” and that while she was, “coming out of the depression I gradually began to eat better, but I didn’t overeat.”

Stacey sought professional help and says she overcame the condition of depression. She said, “I went through a depression, but counseling helped that. It went away,” though she did not have an issue regarding her diet, not eating more, not eating less.

When Wendy was ask if she had *any loss of how to carry out simple tasks*, there was a long pause after the question and she simply said, “I don’t know.” Robert, Carol and Liz each replied with specific disturbance in this area. Robert said that he, “. . . didn’t shower for a long time. I didn’t like the feel of water on my skin. That lasted 2 or 3 years.” Carol said, “Yes, dressing, and I didn’t want to get out of bed. I couldn’t read,

I was afraid to read,” and Liz could not respond until the third probing question, *don't know what to do?*

Yes, not to a pronounced degree. I have a lot of confusion. It takes a lot of time to get things done. I feel very confused. It might have something to do with my age . . . more than that . . . I don't know.

Responses to *how . . . exiting affected . . . diet* included a major impact for Racine about her weight loss. “Yes. Could be the change in life-style; I didn't eat much, and it kind of snow-balled. I lost 72 pounds.” Jamie also lost weight though she said it was not a result of *exiting*; asked if it affected her *diet* she said, “No. Leaving the marriage. I've lost 35 pounds. Nothing changed with leaving the religion.” Carol said she lost weight, but not due to *exiting* either. She said:

No. Witnesses are great eaters, they always have get-togethers and feature food as the come-on. And coffee, and pastries, always something to eat. Now I'm alone more, so I don't eat as much as I used to. I lost 10 pounds, though I will say I feel more fit.

While Liz felt, “I'm not as interested in foods as I used to be, which is unusual for me. Nothing tastes good for me. It's not the same.” And Stevie responded, “My digestive system was totally screwed from the time I was 17 until last year. How much to eat, hasn't really changed.”

Two responses that represent *exiting* as not effecting their *diet* are Didi and Miles. Didi offered the reason for her conclusion.

It didn't at all. When I made the conscious decision to exit myself, when I was journaling, I used the journal to imagine life and goals short term, and long term goals. Everything I could imagine, and everyone of the things I wrote, had been done, it came to be. I put it in my subconscious and my subconscious put it there. When I found some of my journals and read them again I had an empowering experience.

This is related to her *decision making* ability.

Now, it's incredibly easy, because I know that your thoughts are your own reality. You can create a wonderful experience for yourself, and if you don't like your reality, then my way of looking at it is, look closer and you will be able to change it.

Miles however, responded that *exiting* has not affected his *diet*, though he is aware of other factors related to it.

No, although I still don't take care of my diabetes like I should. Maybe it's a subconscious thing, like I'm really not aware of what's going on with my diet. I'm not concerned with the quality of my life in the long term.

Pablo did not answer the question directly, yet he offered an insight about his gaining weight when he said, "I have gained 25 pounds in the last year. I think that's something I should look into." On the other hand, Treanna answered directly, "It did. I gained 30 pounds the first year. I've lost it now."

A Brief Drug History

Four of the questions in the interview deal with the use of drugs; Question 36. *asked Did/do you use prescription drugs?* Question 37. *Did/do you ever use illegal substances?* 38. *Have you ever been hospitalized for substance abuse treatment?;* and 39. *ask If so, how many times?* Five respondents did not use *prescription drugs*, and 8 did not use *illegal substances*.

Only 1 of the respondents was *hospitalized for substance abuse treatment*, Wendy; she was hospitalized for 2 weeks, as she said, for "depression and substance abuse." She did not use *prescription drugs*, yet said that she used *illegal substances* to "self-medicate." Two respondents, Didi and Treanna, did not use *prescription drugs* or *illegal substances*.

Betty, Robert, Stacey, Jamie, Pablo, and Miranda only used *prescription drugs* when directed as a physician for illness, and did not use *illegal substances*. Stacey, Jamie, and Pablo used *prescription drugs* for depression.

Racine did not use *prescription drugs*, though she would not elaborate on exactly what sort of *illegal substances* she did use. Racine said:

At first I did. But it didn't continue as the pattern. When I got out I had to try every that I couldn't do when I was in. Then it just hit me that wasn't going any where and I stopped.

Eric replied as an adult, here and now, he did not use drugs; the first part of his response was given without hesitation, and he projected that he was rather proud about the fact that he did not use drugs. He did however, add an addendum:

Back when I was 19 I smoked marijuana, and did that for about 3 years. Then I quit. It was more of an occasional thing, and not a problem to stop.

Neither Racine nor Eric were *hospitalized for substance abuse treatment*.

Marlene and Carol both used *prescription drugs*; Marlene for depression, and Carol for anxiety. They each also used *illegal substances*. Marlene said:

I did a lot of things out of curiosity, because it was all forbidden to do. I even smoked crack once. I did stuff until it felt like I was really do harm to myself, so I stopped that. Don't do it anymore.

And Carol replied, "Before I was a Witness I smoked pot, sniffed glue, gasoline."

Neither Marlene nor Carol were *hospitalized for substance abuse treatment*.

Miles said that he used *prescription drugs* only briefly. He replied, "I was on Prozac, but I didn't like the effect it had on my sleep patterns." Miles also stated that he used an *illegal substance*, and in his own words, "I only experimented with marijuana 3

times several years ago. I don't do that anymore." Miles was not *hospitalized for substance abuse*.

Stevie and Liz both used *prescription drugs*. Stevie said he took an anti-depressant, and Liz related her experience with *prescription drugs*.

For high blood pressure. Just recently my doctor gave me some Prozac samples to try. That was about the time I got some antibiotics for my grandson. I got confused once and took one of his antibiotics thinking it was a Prozac, and I actually felt pretty good. Then I discovered what I had done, and thought that it might have been a placebo effect that made me feel better. Thankfully, I didn't give my grandson any Prozac. [laughs] That wouldn't have been funny.

They both also stated that they had used a *illegal substance*. In response to this question Stevie remarked, "I recently used an illegal substance, but never did as a Witness." Liz, on the other hand replied about her drug use.

I tried marijuana a few times . . . yup. I liked it too. I didn't take it very much 'cause I felt guilty. I think it was because of the religion. I stopped. Sometimes I think that was a big mistake; giving it up. I really liked it.

Neither Stevie nor Liz were *hospitalized for substance abuse treatment*.

Absence or Presence of Psychological Well-being

The psychological well-being of the participants, along the continuum of *exiting*, was addressed in Question 18. *Did/do you ever feel that you were going insane?* and 28. *Did/do you feel connected to reality?* Twelve of the responses disclosed that they felt they *were going insane*, and 4 did not. Betty and Jamie did not feel that their sanity was in question; for them the issue was depression. Betty explain it this way.

There was deep depression, not a feeling of going insane. The depression lasted 'til a few years ago, because I didn't have my family. It's almost as if they are dead. So, I felt bad about it, but not like I was insane or losing my mind.

Both Betty and Jamie feel very much connected to reality, and Jamie said, "For the first time in my life."

Pablo got in touch with his sanity through research about what was happening to himself physically.

I didn't feel I was going insane. I knew it was a difficult time, and I had to start dealing with this stuff. I did some research, and knew I'm getting panic attacks, which is my body's way of dealing with stress.

And Pablo indicated in his responses that his connection with reality is strong now.

"Right now I do. I have a fairly healthy connection to reality. There's a lot more unknowns out there . . . a lot for me to balance a view point on, definitely."

Racine expressed her feelings to the question after a long thoughtful pause, "a loss of control. Not like I was mentally ill. I didn't know what to do not having any direction." She still is not connected to reality as she says, "No, 'cause I didn't know what reality is. It was always black & white, I don't have that anymore."

Both Miranda and Treanna answered "no," they did not doubt their sanity, yet their connection to reality was not so sure. Treanna's world was *dreamlike* and distant. She said, "No. I was in a dream world. I slept most of the first six months, cause I was so depressed. Everything seemed very far away." Miranda's reality was disoriented

At one time I felt that I was the only person that was disagreeing with the Watchtower, and was wondering, "why do I feel like this?" Then my brother-in-law introduced us to about 30 people who were doing the same thing. Until then I was pretty disconnected from others, and reality, and that I wasn't the only one that had the feeling I disagreed.

Wendy responded with humor and light nervous laughter to the question, *Did/do you ever feel that you were going insane?*

[laughs] No, I thought I had already arrived there. I was hospitalized for a few

weeks. I did time. [laughs]

Wendy also had serious behavioral problems, and the quality of her life.

No, I lived a destructive lifestyle; I was destructive and promiscuous. I didn't care about my life.

Marlene however, was not so humorous when she replied, "Oh yes, many times . . . that the crying wouldn't stop. And, leaving my children was a very emotionally upsetting experience." She did not necessarily lose *connection with reality*; Marlene specifically states that her *reality* became confused.

Not during the depression. What I felt was more like confusion. I was confused. Things weren't unreal, they were very real, and what I felt was confusion. That was about the only thing I was connected too. That was my reality.

Robert, being clinically diagnosed with a psychosis, Schizoaffective Disorder, which he related in his answer to Question 12. *Did/do you experience any sense of loss?* His response to the question *Did/do you ever feel that you were going insane?* is very poignant.

Yeah, it was a direct result of the experience, but when a person feels they are face-to-face with the god-head, nothing is organized in thoughts, and that causes a person to see what's not obvious or seen by everyone else. Then you can never be sure of anything. It was like that for me, but those are only words to describe it, you have to know to understand.

Robert stated that his problems began some time before his actual *exit* though, when he first began to lose his connection with reality.

Not when I exited. Before that I had night flying hallucinations, and tactile hallucinations. It hit me due to what I researched and questioned, and before I left they abandon me. They swore they had the truth, and you had to surrender all to it, couldn't hold onto anything of yourself, and to leave was a violation.

Carol felt internal conflict that caused her to doubt her own sanity, though her *connection with reality* lacked lucidity.

Oh, yes, absolutely. It's like there were two people inside of me, one wanted to get out into the world, and the other was so scared. Like 2 people inside of me. My counselor helped me to see it was because of all those years sticking to a religion's teachings. I had that counselor 4 years . . . No, all mixed-up, like I was in a dream world or a fog. My job helped me to gain equilibrium first, and conviction second, and comaradie [sic] at work, because being "in" is a dream world. So, it was like I kept telling myself, "when are you gonna wake-up?"

Stacey agreed with the question and then pivoted her answer onto her feelings depression and what it stems from.

Yup. Still feel that way [laughter]. It was more depression, not knowing where to turn. You don't have any friends, you don't know where to turn for friends. When you are that narrow-minded, and that the rest of the world is wicked, where do you turn? I've been so trained to be as good as I can be, and you just don't find friends.

At that time her perception of the world shifted, and she lost her *connection with reality*, as she says

No, absolutely not, because you're not living in a real world. Every event that happens around you is taught as part of what the Bible says . . . wars, and other events. Reality was secondary to spirituality.

Didi, who had become a registered nurse, recollected her initial *exit* and her method of coping with her doubts of sanity.

Yes, in the initial five-year period. I started to journal, and I filled books up with my thoughts. Then it became anger.

Her perception of the world is thematic with Stacey's. Did she *feel connected to reality*?

Did I? No, I was free floating for a while. I understood that the world was a specific way, and it wasn't that way at all. The difference is that the reality I was taught, and what I was seeing. It took me a long time to be comfortable with people, and there not always hidden agendas. It took me a long time to . . . to just be able to accept people without fear.

During the interview with Miles he gradually disclosed his personal history. At this juncture he gave details related to a bout with mood disorder that led to his placement in a mental institution.

The dysthymia was explained to me as more of a manic depression, and then the depression would persist. I didn't go on meds, but was hospitalized for 5 weeks. At one point I heard that the therapist called my father about something, I can't remember what, and the stress of going back to his house made my condition worse. I really needed the time to decide to be on my own, which is why I stayed so long.

For Miles the experience in the hospital was actually more of a connection to reality than life with his Jehovah's Witness father, and the hospital visit led to *regaining* his sanity

Life at home was so stressful I couldn't handle it. Being an in-patient at a psychiatric hospital was more of a relief, like a break from the way things were.

When asked about *going insane* Eric did not limit the feeling to *exiting*; for him it occurred just prior to becoming a member.

Yeah. I would say just before I was baptized. The situation had to do with the conflicts with my ex-wife, a non-Witness. She did not like what I was doing at all. She didn't like me taking our children to the meetings, and they were mere babies at the time. She didn't like that. It was a tough decision to get baptized, because it could be the end of the marriage.

His response to being *connected to reality* is unique in that he regained that upon *exiting*, though he reports his dilemma is not entirely resolved at the time of his answer

Yeah, I felt that things got more real when I left. But the more I do research, the more unreal things seem.

During the interview Liz related that caring for her 90 year old grandmother became her primary responsibility when her family, who are all Jehovah's Witnesses, refused to remove her from a negligent residential skilled nursing facility. It was during that time she felt she was *going insane*.

Yeah, very much . . . yes I did. I did and I do. It's connected with my religion, particularly around the time of my Grandmother's turmoil. It was like I was talking to people with blank stares. One time the family went off to an Assembly, and left her at home alone. I asked them is it right to leave her at home unattended, and the response was, "the love of Jehovah comes first." It is enough to drive you insane that I was labeled a "nut-case" for trying to care for my Grandmother.

Feeling *connected to reality* was not an easy thing to do, she said, "No, not at all. It was very unreal."

Stevie went through periods of anxiety, and felt that over the years as a member of the Organization he struggled with *going insane* at various times.

Yeah, a couple of times. When I was with the Witnesses during the panic attacks. I would get to a meeting and would sit there for the first 20 minutes with my heart racing, and then I would be exhausted for the rest of the meeting falling asleep. That went on for about a year. That was 7 years ago. I couldn't even go out of the house. Then I gathered myself together by preaching on the Internet. Then I went back to meetings, after about a year. The second time I went wacko was in 1993. I moved a lot, because I never fit in wherever I went. The Witnesses didn't accept me. I was considered a rebel. By 1997 I had been to 12 different Congregations, and I still found the same thing, and gave-up I wouldn't find a place to be. I took long walks at night, and wandered in total and utter despair, and hopelessness and giving-up.

The probing phrases, *disoriented, spaced-out, feeling out of it* were used to help Stevie respond to the question about being *connected to reality*. He responded:

I suspected it. Ever since a woman at the door told me, "You're brainwashed!" But it's one of the thoughts I didn't let my mind ponder. At the time it wasn't conceivable that she might be right.

Danger to Self

Thoughts of causing harm to one's self or committing suicide are not pleasant to the functional individual. In asking Questions 16. *Did/do you ever have thoughts of harming yourself?* and 17. *Did/do you ever have thoughts of taking your life?* the intent was to explore the potential psychological disturbance to this study population that might lead to *suicide ideation, grave injury to self, or suicide attempts*, hereafter

referred to as *danger to self* (DTS). Questions 19. *Have you ever been confused about what is right and wrong?* and 42. *Have you ever felt confident in your ability to go on with life?* are also presented here to compare and contrast any similarities between the study sample.

Ten had *thoughts of harming* themselves, and of them 1 practiced *cutting*. Nine expressed *suicide ideation*. There was 1 *suicide attempt*, and 12 had been *confused about what is right and wrong*. At the time of this study all 16 participants *felt confident in . . . ability to go on with life*.

Betty, Racine, Jamie, Stacey, Miranda, and Eric, did not present themselves as DTS, either before or after *exiting*.

Betty was “never” *confused about what is right and wrong*, and Jamie said, “No. I always had a very strong sense of right and wrong.” Didi also did not have a problem with *what is right and wrong*.

No, yet I think it’s ethically wrong to not live a full life. I have felt I wanted to have an intellectual life, and even as a child, I felt there was so much lacking, but I don’t know if it was because of my age at the time, or if it is a result of the organization.

Racine’s reply affirmed that she was *confused about what is right and wrong*.

Yes. Because what I was told what is wrong to do, is not what I think is wrong to do. I was told that things are wrong and bad, and I don’t think that is the truth. Not like murder or committing a crime. And adultery was the ultimate sin. Yet, I feel God can overlook that. If two people can work through their problem and forgive each other it’s between them and God. We were taught it was unforgivable. I don’t believe that.

Stacey, echoed the same theme in her reply, “Oh, yes, many times . . . many.” And so did Miranda as well.

The only thing that I was confused about, right and wrong, were the things that the Watchtower were telling us were right and wrong. As a Jehovah’s Witness I was

confused over the issues about the Flag, holidays, blood, smoking, things they said were wrong. To do those things they disfellowship you; you are then one who is considered disfellowshipped from God. Because we did not agree with them they believe we are condemned.

Eric agrees with nervous laughter, as he intellectualizes the impetus for his logic.

Oh yeah, even today [laughs]. I feel that the Bible we have today has been changed. The best thing to do, to know right or wrong, is to look at all sides of an issue. I still strive to understand that. But the organization teaches that what they say is right, and you are not allowed to challenge that.

Eric feels *confident* in his *ability to go on with life*.

Treanna did not have *suicide ideation*, yet she did carry out acts of violence upon herself, thus she manifested DTS. She explains, "Only before I left, not after. I had one more incident of cutting within the first month of when I left."

The act of *cutting* is a practice of using any sharp object (e.g., razor blades, kitchen or hunting knives, broken glass, etc.) to break the skin deep enough to cause pain and bleeding, often leaving scars for life. Treanna elaborated on this in answer to Question 8. *What was that experience like for you?* meaning, the *experience* of being an *active* Jehovah's Witness. She said:

Both good and bad. I felt I lived two different lives. When I was at the meetings, with the brothers and sisters, I enjoyed it. But my other life, in school, was hard. I struggled to have any life outside the organization. My parents wouldn't let me have a life outside, and they worried if I came home late from school, I had to rush right home after school. I felt torn, and it got more confusing as I got older, and I got into a bad habit of cutting myself. I cut myself to see the pain, the source of it. It was a release from feeling pain I could not see.

Though she said that she only practiced *cutting* before she left the Organization, she continued to be *confused about what is right and wrong* after her *exit* and replied, "Sure, yes. The whole first two years after leaving I was confused about what is right or wrong."

However, she has progress to be able to feel *confident in [her] ability to go on with life, get beyond the experience, make new and healthier choices* in her words:

Absolutely. I can get beyond the experience, every day it gets better. And I can make new and healthier choices, I am so enjoying this growing process: I'm fascinated.

Although Racine did not present herself as a DTS she responded to the question *Did/do you ever have thoughts of harming yourself?* with the turmoil she was in, and the question invoked the response:

I didn't get to that extreme, but I did suffer with depression. Not on meds or anything, I just knew. I cried for no reason, for letting people down, because you're searching, but I could never go back. It was an emotional roller coaster. If you were acting less than perfect you would be judged by the Congregation, God, the Society. It were more as a Jehovah's Witness, when I was 15, because I couldn't meet the standards.

She recalled an incident when she was conflicted over an experience as a Jehovah's Witness when she responded to *thoughts of taking [her] life?*

No. When I was 12, I took too many asthma pills, I have asthma. I was so unhappy, and I thought if I took the pills I wouldn't feel the pain. That was the same year I was put on "Public Reproof."

Racine did feel *confident* with her *ability to go on with life, get beyond the experience, make new and healthier choices* and responded softly, "Yes. You don't get beyond the experience, it's always with you."

Ten others replied that they struggled with *danger to self* issues. From *thoughts of harming yourself* to *thoughts of taking your life*, each indicated the depths their experience had taken them. Earlier in this chapter Wendy spoke of her brother's suicide when she was 14 years old, what a great loss that was to her, and how she felt he would

not have died if he was not a Jehovah's Witness. She reported that she did have *thoughts of harming herself*, that she had such thoughts between 1976 and 1984, and that she made one *suicide attempt*

Yes, and I did try. It was about the worst around 1976-1984. I slit my wrist, my left wrist. And I did drugs and alcohol, whatever I could find.

Wendy's reasoning behind the attempt is the absence of a fear of death.

I actually tried to take my life. My attitude was that my life didn't have any value, and I didn't fear death, until I discovered that Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong. I think a very dominant cause of suicides is there is no hell; they teach that death is a deep sleep, not to be feared.

And issues about *right and wrong*, and even a question about it *confused* her.

Oh man, really deep question. Yeah. I think so when I was in, total confusion. Yes, when with them they tell you what is right and wrong; when you are on your own you only think about when or if you could get caught doing it, or not escape getting caught.

She feels *confident* with her *ability to go on with life* now, though not at the time of her *exit*.

Miles was raised as a Jehovah's Witness; received parental pressure to get baptized; lived in fear of disobeying the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, and if he did disobey God would destroy him. He responded:

I had two bouts with thoughts of suicide. The first time was at the age of 12, the second time at 15. After the second time I started to think more for myself, that what I was wasn't what they wanted . . . The closest I ever got was the second time at 15. At school we would get breaks, and I would walk off the school grounds to a road that had a bridge. I looked over the edge and imagined myself falling. I don't have thoughts like that anymore. In 1994 I was diagnosed with dysthymia.

When asked about *right and wrong* Miles' response came from a place of *confusion*, he said, "I don't think so. I'm not sure." He rates his *confidence to go on with life* high, though he is not sure if he can *get beyond the experience, make new and healthier choices*.

I'd say, not 100 per cent, but pretty close to it than not. But, to get beyond the experience, put it behind me, I'm not sure. In the past year I've come a lot further.

Carol replied with a number of issues that were connected to her *thoughts of taking [her] life*, and she weaves a thread connecting *thoughts of suicide* to a long internal battle to *exit*.

Oh, absolutely, yes. Why bother living, I wasted all those years, I don't have anything to live for, I don't have any friends. A huh. After my daughter was born I wanted to get out, I didn't want it any more. And I tried, went to a, went to a counselor. I tried, but I stayed in, it was easier to stay in. That was during the first child was 8 years. I would have had to have been strong. By the time they were teenagers I got to think, "what's the big deal? My son wants to play football." He's always with a football, so I let him play. I got sick of the gossip, and in my heart I knew I was done, but I still wasn't ready to make the cut.

Such *confusion* is also connected to what Carol perceives about *right and wrong*; it is something that she still has not totally discovered.

Yes, absolutely. In fact, to this day I am trying to figure it all out, trying to create "me," trying to create me. I feel like a toddler, and that I'm creating "me," when before I thought about only being a wife and a mother, and I'm way behind the 8-ball at 41 . . . wasted.

On a more positive note, she is gaining *confidence* and strength *to go on with life*, as she says:

Yes. I wouldn't be here going to the University. If I could do that, leave the organization, then I can do anything.

Marlene's depression brought on *thoughts of harming herself* and *thoughts of taking her life*.

Oh yes, during the depression. That lasted 'til about the middle of the 3 years, and then I started to get better.

Yes I did. Actually, that occurred more in the beginning of therapy, when I first started questioning the validity of the organization. My therapist felt it had to do with my upbringing.

Marlene had confusion about *right and wrong*.

Oh yeah. Especially coming out. There was a lot of confusion on what is considered morally right. Everything is either black or white, there are many things that are wrong when you're in. The hard part is making decisions, the organization makes them for you. They even make sexual decision between married couples. Sexual issues are hard to deal with, in what is wrong.

And there is *confidence* in her voice when she says, "Yes. I've made a lot of progress."

Robert had similar *thoughts* when Witnesses stopped talking to him at the time of his *exit*, and *thoughts of taking his life* for 10 years thereafter.

Yes, I did for some time. When they refused to talk to me. After I quit they would shun me. I would see them in town and they would look straight at me and turn their backs. Some would say "hi," but never with a smile.

Yeah, for the last 10 years, it's usually not over Jehovah's Witnesses, over family. What triggers it is I'm not sure who is my father. I was quite messed-up before I got into Jehovah's Witnesses; they just didn't help, made it so things wore on me. Now I'm in treatment with a psychiatrist, psychologist and a counselor. I don't want to take my life now, and the subject is part of therapy.

He said that his *confusion* with *right and wrong* is more about the power of knowing, rather than the power of his feelings, and in that sense he agrees.

In an intellectual sense, yeah. I feel like an observer in the world, like I'm standing by a conveyor belt as everything goes by. I don't want to harm anything or anyone, but the society at large does not have that sort of scruples. I feel fairly confident now and can get beyond the experience and make new and healthier choices.

Didi answered with a, “Yup!” when asked if she had *thoughts of harming herself* and then explained that she had gotten past that.

Yes. I don’t have those thoughts at all anymore. There’s a lot of distance in time since those things, and it feels and seems like then I was a different person than I am now. I can absolutely go beyond the experience, and yeah, I can make new and healthier choices.

Liz said that her feelings of *failure* brought on *thoughts of taking her life*, and that bothered her for a very long time.

Yes, at various times throughout my life, when I felt I was failing my belief system, and through the time when I was disfellowshipped, that I was failing as a Christian. That was back when I was a teenager. My thoughts now aren’t along that line. I don’t think about taking my life.

Liz explained the *confusion* she feels about *right and wrong*.

Maybe I have, but I have pretty strong convictions. Basically, I believe in the principles of the Bible. I know a lot of it is confusing, and they always deal with the technicalities, but not the basics. If you are going to base your belief on the Bible, then how can you say it’s wrong to help your fellow man, and that’s what they were saying; I was wrong for wanting to care for my Grandmother.

She has a modest sense of *confidence* in her future that varies with the moment.

Stevie had *thoughts* that occurred about *harming* himself, yet he never acted on them.

Yeah, I thought of suicide a few times, because of shame. I wouldn’t say I came to the brink; I never took action. I had thoughts of suicide during my life as a Witness at times. Once I got rid of the shame I was ok. I got rid of it about 2 years ago.

When asked about any *confusion about what is right and wrong*, he hesitates and pauses to consider an answer, and then he alludes he can *get beyond the experience*, and *make new and healthier choices*.

Ok . . . wait. [long pause] . . . sure. Not as a Witness, I always thought I knew what was right or wrong. It was spelled out in black and white. After leaving, and I no longer had anybody telling me . . . yeah. I had to figure it out. I was in confusion.

Pablo had a very close Witness friend die, which appeared to be an accident or a suicide. What helped him was getting into therapy.

Yes I did. At the same time I started to research the teachings, a very close friend of mine died. There were indications at his home where he died, that it was a suicide or a tragic accident that occurred while he was working in his garage with the door closed and his car running. I became very depressed. I did think about it, but I . . . I had the sense to ask for professional help. The therapist gave me an anti-depressant, and I took care of my health by cutting out the stresses of being a ministerial servant. I am off the anti-depressant now, and no longer have thoughts of taking my life.

Pablo opts for a logical conclusion if he is *confused about what is right and wrong*.

In the . . . well . . . I obviously have or we couldn't be conversing [laughs] I know not to do harm to anyone or anything if I can avoid it. Things aren't as black and white as they used to be.

He *felt confident in his ability to go on with life* when he responded, "Even when I was in depression, I've always felt that."

Jamie did not have *thoughts of harming herself, or thoughts of taking her life*,

No. I always knew that life held something for me, I wanted to find out what it was. No, I never thought of killing myself.

She related and experience of her brother who did *have thoughts of taking his life* at a very early age, and what she did to overcome the same fears.

No, not directly. My brother and sister did. I found out that he was continually depressed, wanting to kill himself at that at the age of 6. My sister had nightmares about living forever, she didn't want to live forever. I read books to escape, novels, things that allowed me to vividly imagine places and scenes that were more interesting to me.

Jamie has no *confusion about what is right and wrong*, as she said in her own words, "I always had a very strong sense of right and wrong." And regarding her feelings of *confidence to go on with life* she said:

Oh yeah, much more with my ability to deal with it now that I left. I told them I can make my own decisions, thank you very much. I have this vision of just fading away from it . . . not disfellowshipped . . . not disassociated . . . and I have a few people, Witnesses, I keep in contact with they are still active.

Here and Now

The last cluster of interview questions deals with the distillation of the participants feelings about membership down to the present time and place, or *here and now*. The questions that address this aspect of the person in environment, in the present, are 41. *Have you ever felt that being a member was not so wonderful?* 31. *Did/do you feel hostility toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses?* and 21. *Did/do you feel that people who have not ever been one of Jehovah's Witnesses do not understand you?*

Sixteen replied that *people who haven't ever been one of Jehovah's Witnesses do not understand them*. Seven said they felt *hostility toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses*, and 16 answered *that being a member was not so wonderful*. While these questions were not asked in the chronological order of *last* on the list, these questions spiral down to one thing for the participants: where are you now?

Betty, Wendy, Marlene, and Eric, simply responded "yes," *that being a member was not so wonderful?*

Other responses dealt with the complexities of technical issues related to membership. Such subtleties of membership came through in Didi's response; the relentlessness of that experience caused her to ruminate other responses she made.

Yes, I have. I've always felt that, even when I was a member I felt that. In that organization you're too busy to consider where you are as a person, or about being happy. The interminable meetings, talk about the Bible, read about the Bible. The weight became so huge I didn't have a choice. I'm sure I would have committed

suicide. It hit me when my oldest son . . . one day we were standing in the kitchen, and he said, "I am so glad we are not Jehovah's Witnesses anymore." I know I would have committed suicide. They teach you not to fear death.

Robert gave an unpleasant metaphor by comparison.

Oh yeah. It was a heavy burden, could never please them. It was like having an abusive father.

Miranda added an experience of sexual abuse that was never addressed by her because she never revealed it.

It had its moments. On the whole, I think that life had me where I needed to be. As a teenager, I was sexually molested by my father, who was an elder in the Congregation. The local elders were not approachable, and there was no way I could go to them and tell them what happened. No one ever knew, because I never said anything about it. He remained an elder to the day he died.

She felt that talking about her experience to non-Witnesses could not convey her feelings.

It is very hard to understand if you are not [a Witness]. I have often heard people ask, "Why didn't you just leave?" They don't understand how deep the hurt runs. The hurt is so deep that people do not understand.

Jamie found herself taking the stance of a disinterested householder when Witnesses came by her own house.

Oh yeah, definitely not so wonderful. I had a Witness come by the other day and I hide behind the door, just like the people I used know where hiding when I went out. I really don't know what I would say to them anyway. I joke about it now.

Carol agreed that the experience of *being a member was not so wonderful*, and added an assessment of where she is now.

A-huh, a-huh, a-huh. When I contemplate when I was in. I'm at the point now where I know they hampered me. I realized I was put one back, it put me in a pumpkin shell, by the organization, the belief and the teachings.

Stevie began to weep, in the middle of his response, as he recalled the division membership in the Organization caused between himself and one of his siblings.

Yeah. When I was in I got a lot of social pressure, and then doubts that maybe this is not the truth. There was a period of time when I didn't speak to my sister [pause] [participant is emotionally distressed] I feel pretty shitty about that.

When Pablo was very *active* as a member, and his time spent working at the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, he recalled quite openly:

The time I spent at the headquarters, that was really strange. There were times when I thought, "man, there's a bunch of jerks around here; a real bunch of holy zealots.

Treanna and Liz were both troubled and annoyed with their membership in the Organization.

Treanna: Sure. It wasn't wonderful, because I felt like a hypocrite. If I'm going to inconvenienced, I should at least believe in the "cause," and why I'm doing it. I didn't believe in the "cause." I was exhausted living two different lives.

Liz: Yes. It was not a pleasant experience, very inconvenient, and more trouble than it was worth.

Miles expressed a measure of regret that membership *was not so wonderful*, "Yes. I got to the point that being in was keeping me from being the person that I wanted to be so I can enjoy life." Miles feels that non-Witnesses cannot understand that. "I think they would be hard-pressed to fully understand." For Stacey it was not just a single incidence of feeling it *was not so wonderful*, and for her the feeling was accompanied by disappointment, "Oh yeah, lots of times. There were times when I felt that I thought I had a friend and they were a fair weather friend, and it was not a good feeling." Racine said that the feeling *was not so wonderful*, "All the time. That's a constant, it was a given. I accepted it."

Betty, did not *feel hostility* toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses?

Neither did Treanna, Miles, Didi, Jamie or Pablo. Jamie felt defensiveness in the face of those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses. She based that response upon what she was taught in the Organization.

I felt that I had to defend it, not hostility. We were taught to be afraid of people against the organization, they are very bad, don't talk to them, leave, don't read anything they give you, if you take it throw it away immediately. I don't think that's fair.

Wendy's defensiveness was also based on what she was taught, and is very similar to Jamie's response.

Yes, absolutely, when a Jehovah's Witness. Once when leaving the stadium where an Assembly was held, outside on the street people were handing out literature exposing Jehovah's Witnesses. Before we even got to the stadium an announcement was made at our Kingdom Hall not to talk or take any literature from those who might try to hand it to us. We were told they are the Evil Slave. I was afraid of them, it sounded like the Devil had come to town. I was 12 at that time . . . I find it amazing how, when you try to tell people, it's amazing. They have no idea what it was like, they just don't understand.

Eric is also defensive, though he has gone from not feeling *hostility* to being *hostile*

At first I didn't. Yet, I do now. I say, why criticized them? I look at Jehovah's Witnesses as human beings, and I would like to get to know them as people. Some who have left now have hostility toward Jehovah's Witnesses. But I don't.

For those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses who are non-Witnesses Eric is quite empathetic, and he feels that they could not understand what the experience is like as he says, "Most people don't have a clue."

Liz experienced *hostility* and defensiveness, and said, "At one point, yes. I would debate with people to defend the Organization."

Marlene had *hostility* when she was a Jehovah's Witness. She refers to the Organization as "them," and at the mention of the subject she preferred to remain anonymous. Her *hostility* changed when she accepted that she could no longer be a Jehovah's Witness.

When I was a member I did, and for quite some time after. I learned I was very defensive. For sometime after that, if I heard anything about "them" from someone else I would just keep quiet . . . didn't want those who criticized to know I was one. But, when I thought about going back earlier, then I had hostility. When I dropped that idea I lost the hostility, and became angry with the Society.

Pablo had a pre-condition to how he felt related to his membership in the Organization.

I used to feel that those who criticize the Watch Tower Society were former members. I didn't feel hostility, it used to be anger. I would think, "how could they?" It was unfathomable how could they.

Miles responded likewise.

Deep down, no, but I didn't look at it favorably when I was growing up. I've never really had intense anger toward anyone.

Miranda is apologetic *toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses*

I felt that they didn't know any better, Satan had blinded their eyes, and they didn't know any better. It's hard to say, I don't think I remember a time when I was ever hostile toward those who criticized the Watchtower.

Robert is not apologetic, though he does support the line of Miranda's reasoning. He said:

I used to, not anymore, most of the time they are right, about the ones that criticize Jehovah's Witnesses, though I have no loyalty to them.

For Carol membership is a confliction with the world of non-believers, and criticism is to be expected as an ordeal to endure.

Yes, but I took it as a form of persecution, which is evidence that you are living the right way.

Stacey said that she took criticism personally when she was a member, and that membership was attendant with vigilance.

I felt like they were criticizing me if they made such criticism. I felt badly when I overheard a man making fun of another Jehovah's Witness, and I told him I took offense, because he didn't know what was going on in her life. You felt overly sensitive, because you don't fit into what non-Witnesses thought you should. You had to be aware and alert not to discredit what you believed, aware that you didn't do anything wrong.

Treanna's perspective comes from her experience before and after membership.

"No, I just didn't understand them. Not after either." Didi speaks of her feelings after *exiting*. Her rationale about hostility and anger is that they are part of a process one goes through, meaning she went through her hostility to facilitate change in her life.

No. I know that there has to . . . no . . . in the beginning I was critical, and really hostile. Most of us are having pain, and it is usually anger that gives you motivation to change, and you can't hold onto that negative thinking and energy to be productive and happy. Like the five steps of grief, you have to go through some progression.

Stevie explained that when he felt *hostility* it was because he judged those who criticized the Organization. After his *exit* he was not *hostile*, instead he implies that he became vocal against the Organization.

I did feel hostility; I felt judgementalism toward them. At first, when I got out, I freaked out, not hostile. Because the one unforgivable sin is speaking against the Governing Body. They call that apostasy.

Racine changed her *hostility* by literally removing herself from being identified as a Jehovah's Witness, and criticism lost its significance for her.

When I was in the organization I did, but not because of the people; I moved, and it all changed, I didn't have to deal with it. Then when I heard criticism I didn't care, so had no hostility. I told my present husband you have no idea what it like in such a control religion . . . Unless you've been there you can't understand.

Racine's comment that one cannot understand what it is like to be a member of the Organization, unless he or she has actually been a member is thematic; there is a consensus within the sample that being a Jehovah's Witness is an experience that non-Witnesses cannot understand. The prime requisite for understanding is a matter of orientation, the way one views the world. Stevie defines non-Witnesses inability to understand as he says, "How could they possibly understand, *they are worldly*." He does not feel that *worldly* people can have any empathy. His reasoning is, "if you haven't *been* you don't know the hell I've been through."

There is also an issue of comprehension that is necessary to understand the experience, and that even reading or talking about it is difficult for the non-Jehovah's Witness. Stevie said, "Like talking about the Organization's history. There's so much you have to understand to get that." Yet, it is not something that one can simply process like an education, according to Jamie:

Absolutely. I don't think there is any way they can learn about it. I've been asked, "how could you leave the religion you were raised in," but they can't know, or, "why would you leave your choice of religion," but, we did make that choice.

For Didi, Carol and Stacey the non-Witness is unaware of the structure of the Organization, and that the membership is maintained by strict adherence to specific behaviors, as Didi explained, "The only one who could understand is someone in a

religion that touches and controls every facet of your life.” This is what Pablo means when he extends the parameters of empathy to include non-Witnesses who are members in similar groups.

I wouldn’t say, someone who has never been a Witness, but rather someone who has never been part of a high controlling group. To not have been there requires more empathy to understand.

Carol is very emphatic in this regard.

They *don’t* understand, not a clue. I don’t think that the general public knows what it does to you, *that* it hasn’t been exposed to the world. Ask someone, maybe Christmas has been explained, but not the control, the mind control.

Stacey also sees it as an issue of control.

Absolutely. When you find someone who has been in it so long you might wonder how could they have stayed in it so long. But it’s the control--and approval/disapproval.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychosocial effects of *exiting* Jehovah's Witnesses. This was done by interviewing people who have been members of the religion, or are in the process of *exiting*. *Exiting* the religion entails severing all ties as a member in good standing with the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, the corporation that maintains the financial aspects of the institution, as well as the publishing agent that distributes the literature and doctrines as established by the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The state of being a member of Jehovah's Witnesses forms a *matrix of membership* upon which the individual is impelled to construct the fabric of his or her life. Whether *exiting* is voluntary, known as *disassociating*, or involuntary, known as *disfellowshipping*; the explicit nature of these conditions states that the former member becomes a *worldly* person that is to be *shunned*. At the time of such a separation the fabric of the former member's life is rent, and the *matrix* is exposed as an inextricable framework exacerbating smooth transition onto life as a *worldly* person. The participants were individually interviewed by means of a questionnaire that focused on the social and psychological factors that are pertinent to membership; some of the questions also ventured into life beyond membership.

There is also a factor of duration related to a *continuum* that spans the decision to *exit*, and a fair amount of time gone by since the moment of *exit*. This concept of a *continuum* presents a progressive process the *exiting* individual becomes a part of, whereupon he or she goes through *stages* of personal development further away from the dominant personality he or she manifested as a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. Regardless of the *duration* of time a former member of Jehovah's Witnesses spends along the *continuum*, the *matrix of membership* persists indefinitely.

It becomes the *task* of the *exiting* member to reassign the *matrix of membership* a position of least significance in order to develop a functional lifestyle with a view towards *individuation* (Monte, 1991), as opposed to the implausible idyllic metaphor of *life in perfection on a paradise earth* (to use Jehovah's Witnesses imagery presented by the participants). Unlike the high level of expectations of being a member in good standing with Jehovah's Witnesses (reported by the participants in this study, which they indicated were obsessive and unrealistic), *individuation* is the process one comes to attain mature wholeness and balance, that facilitates wellness and a sense of fulfillment in life (Corsini & Wedding, 1995).

To negate such a *task* one remains static inviting dysfunction. The *task* also implies that one cognitively shifts awareness to a congruent modality of living that restores, or recreates a semblance of order and meaning. Until one can reclaim a consciousness capable of coping with crisis, the vicissitudes of life pose as grim reminders, for this survey population, of impending doom looming on the horizon, or as put by the respondents a *fear of Armageddon* and *the wrath of God*. For those of

the participants who choose to take their personal development beyond the experience (of once being a Jehovah's Witness) life becomes a rewarding adventure bringing both wellness and fulfillment.

Results

The Continuum of Exit

The results of the interviews yielded psychosocial themes that were common among the participants, and also a distinct individual difference that may indicate how certain personality types, traits, or characteristics impacted one's ability to cope with change. These themes reflected psychological *fear* for one's safety outside the Organization, or *fear* of eminent death, which the respondents expressed produced varying self-reported measures of stress and anxiety. On the one hand, 9 participants felt such *fear*. On the other hand, 7 did not, and 2 of these respondents felt a release of anxiety and *fear* (Markowitz. 1993).

According to the respondents the social implications of *exiting* touched every aspect of life. The group collective of a cult imposes upon the members to isolate themselves from family, friends and any social support systems that do not agree with the cult, or who are considered outsiders (Singer & Addis, 1992). The explicit nature of imposed social isolation from the world, practiced among Jehovah's Witnesses, limits the benefit of a social support system to a *members only* mindset. Fourteen respondents experienced social isolation, both as members in good standing and immediately upon *exit*.

Upon *exiting* the participants reported the loss of social support from family, friends, and the community of Jehovah's Witnesses at large, thus leaving them without

a reasonable plan for the future, and little or no social skills to immediately develop a new social support system. Membership as an elitist group with deviant norms can be found in sects and cults alike, according to Iannaccone (1992); losing membership in the Organization is losing the last connection with a society, any society, as the WTB&TS has deemed the whole world to be the product of the devil, and to disagree with the leaders means a spiritual death and eventually a literal death, and as Rutherford stated, “everlasting death” (Beckford, 1975, p. 39). Fifteen respondents lamented the loss of contact with family and friends as a result of *exiting*.

There are indications in the results of this study, that the participants present a compendium of various stages of *exiting*, suggesting environmental differences in *space* over linear *time*; at the initial or early stages (Giambalvo, 1993) of *exit* psychosocial disturbance is more profound, as opposed to the psychosocial state of those *task* oriented towards *individuation* further along a *continuum* of time. To illustrate the significance of this Figure 1, the *Continuum of exiting stages*, plots the movement from the inception of the notion to *exit* on into the lifetime of the one *exiting*.

In Figure 1, the *Continuum of exiting stages* (see Appendix A) displays the stages of exiting from *one* person in an environmental psychosocial state; the *matrix of membership (the known)*, into another environmental psychosocial state, *the existence of exit (the unknown)*. Point A represents a base grounded in the *matrix of membership (the known)*. Movement is then created, as one develops an internal locus of control contrary to being planted in membership, towards point C and D that leads to the *moment of exit* point E (Glassel & Wubbolding, 1995). Points C and D were the

most difficult for Stevie felt relief and shock; Liz felt sad and alone; Treanna and Marlene were scared; Betty and Miranda got angry; Didi struggled with justifying her decision to exit; Pablo felt isolated and in limbo; Stacey was sad; Carol had guilt and so did Jamie; Wendy felt suicidal; Racine sleep; Robert dissociated; Eric felt elated and Miles spent time in a psychiatric hospital. Each participant manifested some form of post-cult disturbance as per the work of Giambalvo (1993), Goldberg (1993), Markowitz (1993) and Martin (1993).

At point E, he or she begins to dismantle what is *known*, effectually *un-knowing* an identity as a member in good standing and this becomes one of the many stages talked about by exit counselors (Markowitz, 1993) and those who either walk away or are castaway by the group. On the right of the *moment of exit* one enters into the *existence of exit*, or the *unknown*, a place in time that never existed before to the participants, and the possibility of ever getting help does not even occur. It is at this moment one can get help from exit counseling (Giambalvo, 1993).

Limitations of Study

There are certain limitations to this study that must be considered. Firstly, the questionnaire was devised by the researcher, and therefore the validity and reliability of the exploration process of this study can not been established at this time, and there are no independent and dependent variables. There is secondly, the possibility that any given participant may be engaged in *counter* movement activities that may have influenced his or her responses with bias, and additionally, that long term memory has confabulated events of the past to justify the present.

Third, there is no universality and no generalizability in a small non-random sample such as the one used. The possibilities also exist that the questions may have dealt with private and personal information of a highly sensitive nature the respondents were not prepared to divulge, therefore influencing the qualitative content of their comments. In addition, the lack of clinical conditions under which the interviews were conducted could be construed as lacking scientific substance, and rendering the results as anecdotal rather than critical analysis, the latter being an argument against the qualitative methodology.

Implications for Social Work

This study will provide a frame of reference from which social work practice can implement when working with client's who are of have been Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as working with other clients who have been members of similar groups.

The benefits to the social work profession gleaned from this study are an increased knowledge base about a little known population, and how that knowledge will assist social workers that encounter Jehovah's Witnesses as clients, and particularly social workers that are exit counselors. This knowledge may also be of benefit to social workers who have other clients who come for services due to possible psychosocial disturbances the result being from membership in high-control groups, though it is realized that exit counseling is a specialized field and personal experience in the cult is (Giambalvo, 1995).

West (1990) argues, from the perspective of Lifton (1961) and the research done at the Johnson Foundation Wingspread Conference Center (1986), that *totalist* groups, or *cults*, are a public health problem. The report from the Wingspread

Conference is that through the use of unethical and manipulative practices, concerns arose related to the lack of interest in the well-being of “individual’s needs, goals, and social attachments” (West, 1990, p. 134). The report indicated that cults are responsible for harms to “persons, families, and society at large” (134), and also designated five general areas in which harms occur. These areas are; “(1) individuals and families; (2) government and law; (3) business; (4) education; (5) religion” (134).

As can be seen by the defining of areas of harms above, religion is 1/5th a concern. This holds true to Lifton’s (1961) observations of *totalist* government regimes and prisoner of war survivors and detainment camp refugees from communist China during the 1950s. Through his work social workers can learn to identify abusive relationships from a macro as well as micro perspective. Looking to the larger model of society and *ideological totalism*, Lifton states

Any ideology . . . may be carried by its adherents in a totalistic direction . . . and where totalism exists, a religion, a political movement, or even a scientific organization becomes little more than an exclusive cult. (Lifton, 1961, p. 419)

The authors make it clear that conformity to *totalism* varies even among totalist groups.

West (1990) gave an illustration of naïve researchers who visited and mingled in the midst of cultic groups only to emerge with data collected from quantitative “questionnaires” that the members are “happy and content,” which may be far removed from the truth. West said

But scientists should not be so easily deceived. Former cult members have come forward to say, “But look, I was there! I took part in the deception! It is a well-practiced act that we always put on to deceive outsiders! (West, 1990, p. 132)

He further argues that although a former members perspective may be construed as biased, it is most difficult to collect data from a group that forbids access; restricts observation; contact with certain information is forbidden; or where the leaders influence and scrutiny interfere with the choice of subjects or their responses. The real issue, according to West, is that there is already research that demonstrates, "There are a good many people already dead, or dying, ill or malfunctioning, cripple or developing improperly as a result of their involvement in cults" (West, 1990, p. 133).

The social work profession will benefit from any and all information that enlightens on this subject. West (1990) states that there are 10 million who have been active in cultic groups. Apart from that, consider the effects of membership in just Jehovah's Witnesses based on the results of the interviews conducted in this study. The results reveal psychosocial implications including; fear, anxiety, and depression; poor decision making ability; loss, grief, sadness, failure; suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, a report of family members and a friend who committed suicide, and dangerous thoughts of harm to self; eminent insanity and psychotic diagnosis; isolation, confusion, inability to know the difference between right and wrong; dysfunctional relationships, broken marriages; estranged parental, sibling, and extended family relationships; low sense of worth and low self-esteem; loss of meaning and purpose of life; disoriented sense of time, place and person; anger and hostility; disturbed sleep patterns, nutritional irregularities, loss of ability to carry out simple tasks, poor time management skills; use of illegal substances, and one residential treatment for substance abuse; and fear of exiting. The social work profession need arm itself to work with populations such as the one above.

Implications for Further Research

Further research of this topic developing longitudinal case studies with a view between groups of different organizational structure will help to isolate identifying data that reveals the nature of how such groups function, and what the psychosocial implications are for those who follow and join these groups.

Research into the concept of a *matrix* underlying the psychological and social aspects of membership in high control groups may help to formulate treatment plans designed to operate at a baseline level of functioning, who will facilitate ambulating former members towards a substantial footing in grounded theory. Plotting milestones along the *Continuum of exiting stages* may demonstrate that human beings possess psychological mechanisms and social skills of an intrinsic nature, and that cognition is more a product of conscious behaviors rather than the inverse.

Conclusion

This study collected data from volunteers who felt motivated to tell their stories. They were offered an opportunity to participate in an exploratory study of how their membership and consequent *exit* of Jehovah's Witnesses impacted their lives. The interviews had to be stopped on three separate occasions, as the participants became emotionally overwrought, and incapable of communicating coherently. These participants were extended the option to halt the interview at that time, yet each regained self-composure and opted to continue.

At one point during the interviews a referral was made for a suicide *hotline* in the locality of one participant who did not have suicide ideation during the study, yet

did admit to a history of suicide attempts. That interview was stopped also, the researcher may assessed the nature of the participants *suicide ideation*; if he did not have the *means*, and he did not have a *plan* .

Four out of 16 participants experienced such psychosocial disturbance during the interviews that their sessions nearly terminated in the first hour of intensive recollection regarding their individual experience as a Jehovah's Witness; the length of the interviews averaged 1 1/2 hours, with the shortest being 3/4 of an hour, and the longest 2 hours and 50 minutes (partly due to the researcher intervening with *clarification* or *summary* to determine that the data had been gathered accurately).

The researcher notice a distinct difference in the tone, and mood of the 2 participants at the early end of the *continuum*, and the 2 participants at the later end. The 2 who were closest to the *moment of exit* spoke in an uncertain and rather subdued manner, whereas the 2 who had been out the longest presented with vivacious tenacity, yet these latter 2 recalled vividly that was not the case upon facing the *moment of exit*. One of the respondents explained that it took 5 years to reach a level of lucid equilibrium, and up until that time she was dominated by *fear*, *low self-esteem*, and *uncertainty*.

Wendy, Treanna, Stacey, and Pablo expressed that Jehovah's Witnesses is a cult. Marty (1990) states, "The more isolated, intransigent, withdrawn . . . the less it has come to be regarded as a normative religious expression for America" (p. 128). Those words are all but *discouraging* to Jehovah's Witnesses, as they set themselves very far apart from the "normative religious expression" in *any* country. Not only do they isolate themselves from the world they isolate the rank and file from those who

exit to such a degree that any member observed having *lunch* with a former member runs the risk of being disfellowshipped, and hurled into the *existence of exit (the unknown)*, banished to be *worldly*.

Leaving it all behind was the only way that Didi could succeed in her new life. After 24 years she could finally declare, "I feel so good; my self-esteem is good. I am so grateful. On the first five-year period I was a basket case, I was in uncharted territory."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1.

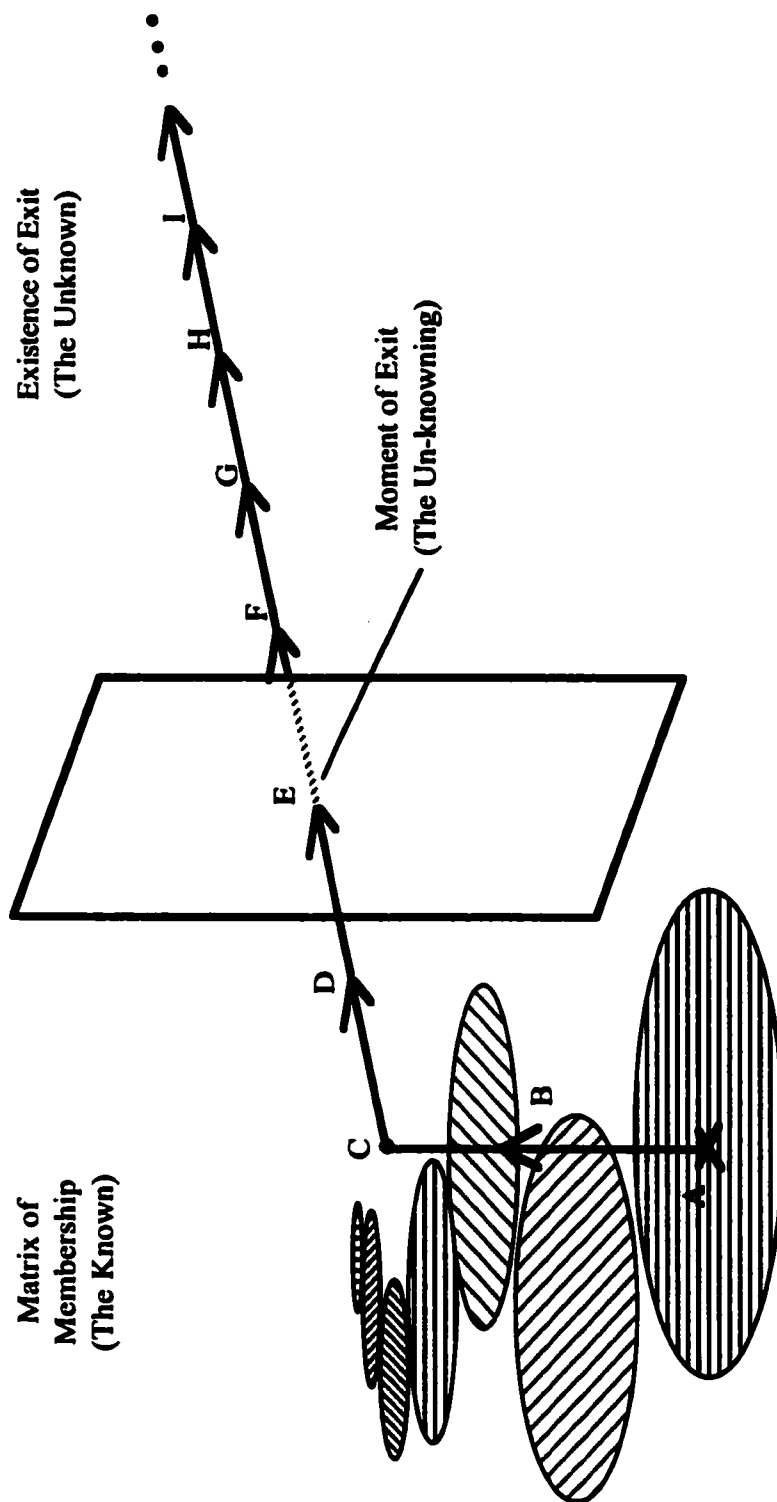


FIGURE 1.
Continuum of exiting stages.
(Copyright 2001; Robert T. Morano, Jr.)

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Were you raised as a Jehovah's Witness?
2. (If respondent's answer to question 1. is "yes"): What was that like?
3. When did you first become a Jehovah's Witness?
4. How long were you in the organization?
5. What prompted your decision?
Probe: Parents, spouse, friends, yourself.
6. How long has it been since you left?
Probe: 3 months, less than 6 years
7. What activities did you participate in when you were in the organization?
Probe: attend meetings, read all assigned material, participate,
8. What was that experience like for you?
9. What influenced your decision to leave?
10. How has that choice affected your life?
11. What effects did that decision have on you?
Probe: make you sad, happy, cry, laugh
12. Did/do you experience a sense of loss?
13. Did/do you feel any sense of failure?
14. Did/do you feel fear for not obeying the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses?
15. Did/do you feel that not obeying them will result in "God's wrath?"

Probe: punish you, destroy you

16. Did/do you ever have thoughts of harming yourself?

17. Did/do you ever have thoughts of taking your life?

18. Did/do you ever feel that you were going insane?

Probe: losing your mind, going crazy, mentally ill

19. Have you ever been confused about what is right and wrong?

Probe: morally, ethically

20. Did/do you feel isolated from the world?

21. Did/do you feel that people who haven't ever been one of Jehovah's Witnesses don't understand you?

Probe: don't know how you feel,

22. Since leaving the organization can you freely socialize with others in the community?

23. What has exiting done to your personal relationships, work, friends, or family?

24. How has your decision to exit Jehovah's Witnesses effected how you feel about yourself?

Probe: sense of worth, esteem,

25. Has exiting effected your sense of purpose in life?

Probe: meaning of life, reason for living

26. Did/do you ever feel 'guilt' for your decision?

Probe: bad about leaving, wrong decision

27. Did/do you ever have thoughts that being a member wasn't all that bad?

Probe: thoughts of going back, this can't be happening

28. Did/do you feel connected to reality?

Probe: life is real, disoriented, spaced-out, feeling out of it

29. Is it easy to make decisions?

Probe: can you, without hesitation, don't know what to do

30. Did/do you harbor any anger or hostility?

Probe: towards organization, other members, family

31. Did/do you feel hostility toward those who criticize Jehovah's Witnesses?

Probe: by defending organization, members

32. How has exiting affected your sleep patterns?

Probe: sleep more, less, restless, deep

33. Did you experience any loss of how to carry out simple tasks?

Probe: personal hygiene, grooming,

34. Did/do you have difficulty managing your time?

Probe: distracted, time-frame, forgetful

35. How has exiting affected your diet?

Probe: eat more, less, nutritious foods, junk foods

36. Did/do you use prescription drugs?

Probe: as prescribed, more, less

37. Did/do you ever use illegal substances?

Probe: how often, what setting

38. Have you ever been hospitalized for substance abuse treatment?

Probe: spent time in residential treatment, detox, sober-living

39. If so, how many times?

Probe: once, more than once

40. Have you ever felt “fearful” about exiting?

Probe: unable to cope, anxious,

41. Have you ever felt that being a member was not so wonderful?

Probe: not pleasant, an inconvenience, more trouble than worth it

42. Have you ever felt confident in your ability to go on with life?

Probe: get beyond the experience, make new and healthier choices

43. What is your age?

44. What is your biological sex?

45. What is your ethnicity?

Probe: African American, Hispanic non-white, White/Caucasian, Asian (or specific), Pacific Islander (or specific), Indigenous people (nation specific), any dual ethnicity, other.

End of Interview Session.

APPENDIX C
LETTER OF CONSENT

LETTER OF CONSENT

My name is Robert T. Morano, Jr. and I am a candidate for a Master's of Social Work from the Department of social work, California State University, Long Beach. I invite you to participate in my study to explore the answers to the research question: What are the issues that influence a person's decision to exit Jehovah's Witnesses, and what, if any, are the psychosocial effects of leaving Jehovah's Witnesses? Although you might not benefit directly by your participation it is hoped that the results will contribute to social work practice to help exiting and former members address similar issues, which may help promote healthy and productively satisfying lives.

If you choose to participate in this study you will be interviewed by me in person or by telephone, whichever is most convenient for you. The time needed to complete the interview will be up to 40 minutes but not more than two hours. The questions asked during the interview will be focused only on information related to your experience regarding the research question stated above.

Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary. Some of the questions are sensitive and personal may cause you to recall unpleasant memories. You may refuse to answer any question without consequences. It is the intent of this study that no harm comes to you. If you feel that you are at risk of causing yourself harm, or if it can be immediately assessed that you are in need of chemical dependency or substance counseling with your best interests at heart. If you decide to withdraw from the study

at any time, you are free to do so without any negative consequences or attempts by me to contact you against your will.

Your responses will remain completely confidential. Even when the study results are reported, your name will not be revealed. At the close of this study written manuscripts of the interview will be destroyed, only the segments used in the final thesis will remain and your true identity will be concealed by the use of a pseudonym. Anyone who reads the finished product will not be able to identify you with the content.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you agree to do so, please sign, print your name, fill-in the date below, and mail this to:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Sincerely,

Robert T. Morano, Jr.

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